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CONFESSIONS

OF

A THUG.

BY

CAPTAIN MEADOWS TAYLOR,

IN THE SERVICE OF H.H. THE NIZAM.

I have heard, have read bold fables of enormity,
Devised to make men wonder, but this hardness
Transcends all fiction.

LAW OF LOMBARDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONFESIONS

OF THE

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CONFESSIONS

OF

A THUG.

CHAPTER I.

SETTING FORTH HOW AMEER ALI SPENDS THE NINTH NIGHT
OF THE MOHORUM, AND HOW HE LOSES HIS MISTRESS.

ZENAT'S exclamation drew us to the window. "Quick!" she said; "look out, or you will lose the sight; they are even now passing the Char Minar."

We did look out, and the sight was indeed magnificent. A crowd of some hundreds of people were escorting a Punjah, that holy symbol of our faith; most of them were armed, and

their naked weapons gleamed brightly in the light of numberless torches which were elevated on lofty bamboos ; others bore aṭṭab-geers, made of silver and gold tinsel, with deep fringes of the same, which glittered and sparkled as they were waved to and fro by the movements of those who carried them. But the object the most striking of all was the Char Minar itself, as the procession passed under it ; the light of the torches illuminated it from top to bottom, and my gaze was riveted, as though it had suddenly and startlingly sprung into existence.

The procession passed on, and all once more relapsed into gloom : the Char Minar was no longer visible to the eye, dazzled as it had been by the lights ; but as it became more accustomed to the darkness, the building gradually revealed itself, dim and shadowy, its huge white surface looking like a spectre, or I could fancy like one of the mysterious inhabitants of the air whom, we are told, Suleeman-ibn-Daood and other sages had under their command, and were thus enabled to describe. Again, as we gazed, another procession would pass, and a sudden flash as of lightning would cause the same effect ; interior and exterior of the edifice

were as bright, far brighter they seemed, than at noonday.

I was enraptured. Zenat had left us to ourselves, and we sat, my arm around my beloved, while she nestled close to me, and we murmured to each other those vows of love which hearts like ours could alone frame and give utterance to.

Long did we sit thus—Sahib, I know not how long—the hours fled like moments.

“Look!” cried Zora, “look at that mighty gathering in the street below us; they are now lighting the torches, and the procession of the Nāl Sahib will presently come forth.”

I had not observed it, though I had heard the hum of voices; the gloom of the street had hitherto prevented my distinguishing anything; but as torch after torch was lighted and raised aloft on immense poles, the sea of human heads revealed itself. There were thousands. The street was so packed from side to side, that to move was impossible; the mass was closely wedged together, and we waited impatiently for the time when it should be put in motion, to make the tour of the city.

One by one the processions we had seen pass before us ranged themselves in front, and as they

joined together, who can describe the splendour of the effect of the thousands of torches, the thousands of aftar-geers, of flags and pennons of all descriptions, the hundreds of elephants, gaily caparisoned, bearing on their backs their noble owners, clad in the richest apparel, attended by their armed retainers and spearmen, some stationary, others moving to and fro, amidst the vast mass of human beings!

One elephant in particular I remarked,—a noble animal, bearing a large silver umbara, in which sat four boys, doubtless the sons of some nobleman from the number of attendants which surrounded them. The animal was evidently much excited, whether by the noise, the lights, and the crowd, or whether he was *must*, I cannot say; but the Mahout seemed to have great difficulty in keeping him quiet, and often dug his ankoos into the brute's head with great force, which made him lift his trunk into the air and bellow with pain. I saw the Mahout was enraged, and, from the gestures of some of the persons near, could guess that they were advising him to be gentle; but the animal became more restive, and I feared there would be some accident, as the Mahout only punished him the more severely. At last, by some un-

lucky chance, the blazing part of a torch fell from the pole upon which it was raised on the elephant's back ; he screamed out with the sudden pain, and raising his trunk, rushed into the crowd.

Ya Alla what a sight it was ! Hundreds, as they vainly endeavoured to get out of the way, only wedged themselves closer together, shrieks and screams rent the air ; but the most fearful sight was, when the maddened beast, unable to make his way through the press, seized on an unfortunate wretch by the waist with his trunk, and whirling him high in the air dashed him against the ground, and then kneeling down crushed him to a mummy with his tusks. Involuntarily I turned away my head ; the sight was sickening, and it was just under me.

When I looked again, the brute, apparently satisfied, was standing quietly, and immediately afterwards was driven away ; the body of the unfortunate man was carried off and deposited in a neighbouring shop ; and all again became quiet.

All at once the multitude broke out into deafening shouts of " Hassan ! Hoosein ! Deen ! Deen ! " the hoarse roar of which was mingled

with the beating of immense nagaras*. The sound was deafening, yet most impressive. The multitude became agitated; every face was at once turned towards the portal from which the sacred relic was about to issue, and it came forth in another instant amidst the sudden blaze of a thousand blue lights. I turned my eye to the Char Minar. If it had looked brilliant by the torch-light, how much more so did it now! The pale sulphureous glare caused its white surface to glitter like silver; high in the air the white minarets gleamed with intense brightness; and, as it stood out against the deep blue of the sky, it seemed to be a sudden creation of the genii—so grand, so unearthly,—while the numberless torches, overpowered by the superior brightness of the fireworks, gave a dim and lurid light through their smoke, which, as there was not a breath of wind, hung over them.

All at once a numberless flight of rockets from the top of the Char Minar sprung hissing into the sky, and at an immense height, far above the tops of the minarets, burst almost simultaneously, and descended in a shower of

* Large drums.

brilliant blue balls. There was a breathless silence for a moment, as every eye was upturned to watch their descent, for the effect was overpowering. But again the shouts arose, the multitude swayed to and fro like the waves of a troubled sea; every one turned towards the Char Minar, and in a few instants the living mass was in motion.

It moved slowly at first, but the pressure from behind was so great that those in front were obliged to run; gradually, however, the mighty tide flowed along at a more measured pace, and it seemed endless. Host after host poured through the narrow street; men of all countries, most of them bearing naked weapons which flashed in the torch-light, were ranged in ranks, shouting the cries of the faith; others in the garbs of fakeers chaunted wild hymns of the death of the blessed martyrs; others again in fantastic dresses formed themselves into groups, and, as they ran rather than walked along, performed strange and uncouth antics; some were painted from head to foot with different colours; others had hung bells to their ancles, shoulders and elbows, which jingled as they walked or danced; here and there would be seen a man painted like a tiger, a rope passed round his

waist, which was held by three or four others, while the tiger made desperate leaps and charges into the crowd, which were received with shouts of merriment.

Some again were dressed in sheepskins, to imitate bears; others were monkeys, with enormous tails, and they grinned and mowed at the crowd which surrounded them. Now, some nobleman would scatter from his elephant showers of pice or cowrees among the crowd below him; and it was fearful, though amusing, to watch the eager scramble and the desperate exertions of those undermost to extricate themselves,—not unattended by severe bruises and hurts. Bodies of Arabs, singing their wild war-songs, firing their matchlocks in the air, and flourishing their naked swords and jumbeas, joined the throng, and immediately preceded the holy relic, which at last came up.

It was carried on a cushion of cloth of gold, covered by a small canopy of silver tissue; the canopy and its deep silver fringes glittering in the blaze of innumerable torches. Moolas dressed in long robes walked slowly before, singing the Moonakib and the Murceas*. Men

* Hymns peculiar to the Mohorum.

waved enormous chourees of the feathers of peacocks' tails, incense burned on the platform of the canopy, and sent up its fragrant cloud of smoke, and handfuls of the sweet ubeer were showered upon the cushion by all who could by any means or exertions get near enough to reach it.

Gradually and slowly the whole passed by : who can describe its magnificence ? Such a scene must be seen to be felt ! I say *felt*, Sahib, for who could see a mighty multitude like that, collected for a holy purpose with one heart, one soul, without emotion ? Hours we sat there gazing on the spectacle ; we scarcely spoke, so absorbed were we by the interest of the scene below us. At length however the whole had passed, and the street was left to loneliness and darkness : the few forms which flitted along here and there, looked more like the restless spirits of a burial-ground than human beings,—and the silence was only now and then broken by a solitary fakeer, his bells tinkling as he hurried along to join the great procession, the roar of which was heard far and faintly in the distance.

Just as we were about to retire, a number of men formed themselves into a circle around a

pit in which were a few lighted embers ; but some bundles of grass were thrown on them—the light blazed up—and drawing their swords they danced round and round the fire, waving their weapons, while all shouted aloud in hoarse voices the names of the blessed martyrs. The blazing fire in the centre lighted up their wild forms and gestures as they danced, tossing their arms wildly into the air. Now they stood still, and swayed to and fro, while the fire died away and they were scarcely perceptible. Again more fuel was thrown on, the red blaze sprung up far above their heads, and their wild round was renewed with fresh spirit.

The night was now far spent, and the chill breeze which arose warned us to retire. Indeed Zenat and her mother had done so long before, and we were left to ourselves.

Sahib! that was the last night I passed with my beloved, and the whole of our intercourse remains on my memory like the impression of a pleasing dream; on which I delight often to dwell, to conjure up the scenes and conversations of years past and gone—years of wild adventure, of trial, of sorrow, and of crime.

I can picture to myself my Zora as I parted from her on the following morning ; I can again

hear her protestations of unalterable love, her entreaties that I would soon return to her; and above all I remember her surpassing loveliness, and the look of anguish I might call it with which she followed me as I left her, after one long passionate embrace. These impressions, I say, still linger on a mind which has been rendered callous by crime, by an habitual system of deception, and by my rude intercourse with the world—my deadliest enemy; and they are refreshing and soothing, because I have no wrong toward her to charge myself with. I rescued her; she loved me, and I loved her too; we wanted nought but a longer intercourse to have strengthened that affection, which would have lasted till death. But why should I talk thus? Why should I, a convicted felon and murderer, linger on the description of such scenes and thoughts? Sahib, I have done with them; I will tell you of sterner things—of the further adventures of my life.

I returned to my father: he was not angry at my absence, and I found Mohun Das, the dullal, closeted with him, and also another sahoukar-looking person. Mohun Das had been eminently successful: the sahoukar I saw was the assistant in a wealthy house who had

need of all our goods, and he was come to see them before the bargain was finally closed. They were displayed to him, both goods and jewels; he approved of all, said he would return shortly with an offer for them, and having made a list of the whole he departed.

“Now,” said Mohun Das, “about the price; what do you ask?”

“You know better than I do,” said my father, “therefore do you speak, and remember, the more they sell for the more you get.”

“I have not forgotten your munificence,” said the Dullal, “and I say at once the cloths are worth sixteen, and the jewels ten thousand rupees; but you must ask thirty thousand,—you will get twenty-five I dare say.”

“It is too little,” said my father; “they cost me nearly that sum; and how am I to pay my guards if I get no profit? I shall ask thirty-five for the whole.”

“Well,” said the Dullal, “if you do, so much the better for me; but mark what I say, you will get no more than my valuation; however, if you will trust me and leave it to my judgement, I will get a fair price.”

“I will, but recollect, twenty-five thousand is the least.”

“Certainly,” said the Dullal; “I go to do your bidding.”

“Go,” said my father; “Alla Hafiz! be sure you return quickly.”

It was noon before he returned, but it was with a joyful face when he did come.

After many profound salams, he exclaimed, to my father: “You have indeed been fortunate; your good destiny has gained you a good bargain. I have got thirty thousand six hundred rupees for the whole; we had a long fight about it, and wasted much breath; but, blessed be Narayun! your slave has been successful: see, here is the Sahoukar’s acknowledgement.”

My father took it and pretended to read; I was near laughing outright at his gravity as he took the paper and pored over the crabbed Hindee characters, of which he did not understand one,—nor indeed any other; for he could neither read nor write.

“Yes,” said he gravely, “it is satisfactory; now how am I to be paid?”

“The Sahoukar will arrange that with you in any way you please,” said the Dullal: “ready money or bills are equally at your service; but as all transactions are generally at six months’

credit, the interest for that time at the usual rate will be deducted."

"And if I take bills, I suppose the interest will be allowed till I reach Benares, or whatever place I may take them upon?"

"Certainly."

"Good," continued my father; "do you attend here with the Sahoukar, and we will settle all about it, and he can take away the merchandise whenever he pleases."

So the Dullal departed.

It was now about the time when the tazeas were to be brought to the edge of the river to be thrown into the water, and as the Karwan was not far from the spot, I proposed to my father to send for our horses and ride thither to see the sight.

He agreed, the horses were quickly brought, and we rode to the bridge over which the road passes into the city. Taking our stand upon it, we beheld beneath us the various and motley groups in the bed of the river; there were thousands assembled; the banks of the river and the bed were full,—so full, it seemed as if you might have walked upon the heads of the multitude. The aftab-geers, and the tinsel of

the various tazeas glittered in the afternoon sun,—the endless variety of colours of the dresses had a cheerful and gay effect—and, though it was nothing to the grand appearance of the procession at night, still it was worth looking at. The tazeas were brought one by one, by the various tribes or neighbourhoods to which they belonged, and thrown into the pools in the bed of the river, for deep water there was none; but there was sufficient for the purpose, and as each glittering fabric was cast in, it was assailed by hundreds of little ragged urchins, who quickly tore the whole to pieces for the sake of the ornaments; and there was many a warm contest and scramble over these remains, which excited the laughter of the bystanders.

One by one the various groups returned towards their homes, looking wearied and exhausted; for the excitement which had kept them up for so many days and nights was gone. In many a shady corner might be seen lying fast asleep, an exhausted wretch—his finery still hanging about him,—his last cowree perhaps expended in a copious dose of bhung, which, having done part of its work in exciting him almost to madness during the preceding night,

had left him with a racking brain, and had finally sent him into oblivion of his fatigue and hunger.

The Mohorum was ended : we staid on the bridge till the time for evening prayer, when, repairing to an adjacent mosque, we offered up our devotions with the others of the faithful who were there assembled. This done, I told my father I should again visit Zora, and most likely remain at her house all night : he bid me be sure to return early in the morning, on account of our business ; and having promised this, I departed.

I rode slowly through the now silent and almost deserted streets : the few persons whom I met were hurrying along to their homes, and had no common feeling or interest with each other as before. I passed along the now well-known track, and was soon at the house which held all that was most dear to me on earth. I sent up my name and dismounted ; I expected the usual summons, and that I should see that countenance I longed to behold welcoming me from the window. I waited longer than I could assign a cause for in my own mind ; at last my attendant returned, and as he quitted the threshold the door was rudely shut after him, while

at the same time the casements of the windows were both shut. What was I to think of this? Alas! my forebodings were but too just. My attendant broke in upon my thoughts by addressing me.

“Her mother, whom I have seen,” said he, “bid me give you her salam, and tell you that her daughter is particularly engaged and cannot receive you. I ventured to remonstrate, but the old woman became angry, and told me that she had behaved civilly to you, and that you could not expect more; and further, she said, ‘Tell him from me, that he had better act the part of a wise man, and forget Zora, for never again shall he see her; it will be in vain that he searches for her, for she will be beyond his reach; and I would rather that she died, than become the associate and partner of an adventurer like him, who, for all I know, might inveigle her from home, and, when he was tired of her, leave her in some jungle to starve. Go and tell him this, and say that if he is a wise man he will forget her.’”

“And was this all?” exclaimed I in a fury; “was this all the hag said? I will see whether I cannot effect an entrance;” and I rushed at the door with all my might. In vain I pushed

and battered it with the hilt of my sword, it was too securely fastened within to give way. I called out Zora's name—I raved—I threatened as loud as I could to destroy myself at the door, and that my blood would be upon the head of that cruel old woman. It was all in vain, not a bolt stirred, not a shutter moved, and I sat down in very despair. A few persons had collected, observing my wild demeanor; and as I looked up from my knees, where my face had been hidden, one of them said, "Poor youth! it is a pity his love has been unkind and will not admit him."

"Pooh!" said another, "he is drunk with bhung; Alla knows whether we are safe so near him!—he has arms in his hands; we ought to get out of his way: your drunken persons are ticklish people to deal with, let alone their being a scandal to the faith."

I was ashamed; shame for once conquered anger. I walked towards my horse, and mounting him rode slowly from the place. How desolate everything appeared! The night before, I had reached the summit of happiness. I cast one look to the window where I had sat in sweet converse with her whom I was destined no more to behold; I thought on her words, and the

glittering scene was again before me. Now all was dark and silent, and accorded well with my feelings. I rode home in this mood, and throwing myself down on my carpet, gave myself up to the bitterness of my feelings and unavailing regret. A thousand schemes I revolved in my mind for the recovery of Zora during that night, for I slept not. One by one I dismissed them as cheating me with vain hopes, only to be succeeded by others equally vague and unsatisfactory. I rose in the morning feverish and unrefreshed, having determined on nothing. There was only one hope, that of the old woman the nurse; if I could but speak with her, I thought I should be able to effect something; and as soon as I could summon one of the men who had attended Zora, I sent him for information.

CHAPTER II.

BHUDRINATH RECOUNTS HIS ADVENTURES. THE DULLAL
FINDS TO HIS COST THAT A BARGAIN IS OFTEN EASY TO
MAKE AND EASY TO BREAK.

I HAD not seen Bhudrinath now for some days, and fearing he might think me neglectful, I went to the serai in which he and the men had put up.

“Ah!” cried he when he saw me approach, “so we are at last permitted to see the light of your countenance; what, in the name of Bhowanee, have you been about? I have sought you in vain for the last three days.”

“Tell me,” said I, “what you have been doing, and you shall know my adventures afterwards.”

“Well then,” said he, “in the first place, I have made a series of poojahs and sacrifices at

the different temples around this most Mahomedan of cities ; secondly, I have seen and mixed in the Mohorum ; and lastly, I have assisted to kill seven persons."

" Killed seven persons ! " I exclaimed in wonder, " how, in the name of the Prophet, did you manage that ? "

" Nothing more easy, my gay young jemadar," he replied : " do you not know that this is the Karwan, where travellers daily arrive in numbers, and from which others are as frequently departing ? Nothing is easier than to beguile them to accompany us a short distance, pretending that we are going the same road : why a Thug might live here for ever, and get a decent living. The people (my blessings on them !) are most unsuspicious ; and, thanks to Hunooman and his legions, there is no want of rocks and wild roads about the city, which give capital opportunities for destroying them."

" Ajaib ! " I exclaimed, " this is very wonderful ; and who were they ? "

" Not in the least extraordinary," said Bhudrinath coolly, " if you think on it ;—but to answer your question. The first was a Bunnea who was going to Beeder ; we took him to Golconda, and buried him among the tombs, and

we got seventy rupees and some pieces of gold from him. The second were two men and their wives, who said they were going to Koorungul : where that is Bhugwan knows ! but it is somewhere in a southerly direction. We killed them about three coss from the city, among some rocks, and left them there."

"That was wrong," said I, "you should have buried them."

"Not at all wrong, my friend; who will take the trouble of inquiring after them? Besides, we had not time, for the day had fully dawned, and we feared interruption from travellers; we got above two hundred rupees, and two ponies, which I have sold for thirty rupees."

"Well," said I, "these make five; and the other two"—

"They lie there," said Bhudrinath, pointing to where a horse was picketed; "they were poor devils, and not worth the trouble of taking out; we only got forty-two rupees from both."

"Dangerous work," said I; "you might have been seen."

"Oh ! no fear of an old hand like me; every one was off to the city to gape at the show, and we were left alone. I was deliberating whether we should not accompany them on the road we

came in by, and by which they were going ; but Surfuraz Khan cut short my doubts and uncertainties by strangling one fellow on the spot, and I followed his example with the other ; the bodies were concealed till night, and then buried."

"But is there no fear of the grave bursting?" I asked.

He laughed. "Fear! oh no, they lie deep enough ; and you know our old tricks."

"Well," said I, "it is most satisfactory, and I have missed all this, have been a fool, and have lost my mistress into the bargain."

Bhudrinath laughed immoderately ; but seeing the gravity of my face, he said,

"Never mind, Meer Sahib, care not for my merriment ; but truly thy face wore so lack-a-daisical an expression, that for my life I could not have refrained. Cheer up, man, there is plenty of work in store for you ; women will be faithless, and young and hot-brained fellows will grieve for them ; but take a friend's advice, make your profession your mistress, and she at least will never disappoint you."

"Your advice is good," said I ; "nevertheless the mistress I have lost is, as you know, worthy of regret, and I shall miss her for many a day.

But tell me, what have you now in hand,—anything in which I may have a share?”

“Why no,” he replied, “nothing; but if you are so inclined, we will take a ramble this evening through the bazars, we may perhaps pick up somebody.”

“Of course I will be with you, for in truth my hand will get out of practice if I neglect work. But have you seen my father?”

“I have not,” said Bhudrinath; “I hear he is very much engaged about the property, and do not like to disturb him.”

“You are right, he is,” said I; “but he will finish all today, and get the money. I suppose after that we shall not stay long here, and for my part I care not how soon we set off; I am anxious for new scenes and adventures, and we are not likely to do much here. Is not Surfuraz Khan here?”

“No; he is gone with a party of seven travellers towards Puttuncherroo, and has taken ten or fifteen of the best of the men with him; he will not be back probably before night, if then.”

“Who were the travellers?”

“Bunneas, I heard,” said Bhudrinath carelessly; “I did not see them myself, and Sur-

furaz Khan was in too great a hurry to give me any information."

"Out upon me!" I exclaimed, vexed at my idleness; "here have I been amusing myself while all this has been going on: for the sake of the Prophet, let us do something soon, that I may settle scores with my conscience, for I have hardly assurance enough to look you in the face after my behaviour."

"Well," said he, "come this evening; if we can't decoy any one, we will kill somebody for amusement and practice."

"I agree," said I; "for by Alla! I must do something. I am as melancholy as a camel, and my blood, which boiled enough yesterday, seems now scarcely to run through me;—it is not to be borne."

I found when I reached home that the Dullal had arrived, and with him the Sahoukar's clerk, and some porters to carry the goods, as well as fellows with matchlocks and lighted matches and others with swords and shields to escort them. I stared at them.

"One would think you were going to battle, Séthjee," said I, "with all those fierce fellows; I am half afraid of them."

The fellows laughed; and the clerk replied,

“They are necessary, and we always have them. If our goods were stolen, nay, carried off before our eyes, should we get any redress? no indeed: we therefore protect our property the best way we can.”

“Now,” said my father, “take your goods and be off with them; they are no longer mine, and I fear to allow them to remain under my roof.”

“Surely,” said the clerk, “they will be out of your way directly; and now let us speak about your money, or will you take some merchandise as part of it?”

“Not a bit, not a bit,” replied my father; “I want all my money in rupees—no, stay, not all in rupees; give me five thousand in silver and the rest in gold, it will be easier carried.”

“I suppose you mean five thousand rupees, and the rest in gold bars; well, you must purchase gold according to weight, and the best is twenty rupees a tola;—but you had better take bills, and the exchange is favourable.”

“No, no; no bills,” said my father, “but the gold; if I remember rightly, the price of gold was high when I left Delhi, and was likely to remain so; and I have plenty of persons for my guard if robbers should attack me.”

“You forget me,” cried the Dullal, “and my per-centage.”

“Make yourself easy,” said I; “it will be paid out of the five thousand rupees; it will be about fifteen hundred I think.”

“What did you say? fifteen hundred! to whom?” asked the clerk.

“To this Dullal,” said I; “I suspect the rascal is cheating us.”

“Cheating! surely he is; why Mohun Das, good man, what have you been about? are you mad, to ask so much?”

“Ah, it was my lord’s offer and promise,” said he, “and surely I shall now get it; pray what business is it of yours?”

“What ought he to have?” asked my father.

“One per cent is ample,” replied the other; “and you might have saved this too if you had only applied yourself to the different sahoukars.”

“We were strangers,” said I, “and knew not their places of residence; so we were obliged to have recourse to this rascal, who offered his services.”

“What! did you not take me from the Char Minar? did you not promise me five per cent,

and bind me to secrecy about the sale of your goods?" cried the Dullal.

"Listen to him," said my father; "he raves. Now, Meer Sahib, did not this bhurwa come begging and beseeching for employment, and when I said I would try him, and asked his terms, he said he was miserably poor, and would take whatever was given him; was it not so? And now, Punah-i-Khoda, we are to be bearded in this manner, defrauded of fifteen hundred rupees, where we have not as many cowrees to give, and made to eat dirt into the bargain. Beat him on the mouth with a shoe! spit on him! may he be defiled so that Ganges' water would not purify him! may his mother, sisters, and all his female relatives be"—

"Nay, my good friend," said the Sahoukar's clerk, "be not thus rash and hot-headed, nor waste your breath upon so mean a wretch; since you have employed him something must be given, it is the custom, and next time you will know better; say, may I pay him the one per cent, which will be three hundred and six rupees?"

"Three hundred and six rupees! Alla, Alla! where am I to get the half?" cried my father: "for the love of the Prophet, get me off what

you can ; I swear by your head and eyes that I am a poor man, and only an agent ; is it not so, Meer Sahib ? am I not miserably poor ? ”

“ You certainly cannot afford to pay so much money as one per cent on this large sum,” I replied ; “ nevertheless, as such appears to be the custom, you had better give something, say one hundred and fifty rupees.”

“ Certainly,” said my father ; “ I am ready ; I will not refuse anything in reason ; but so large a sum—I was quite astounded at the impertinence of the demand, and lost my temper like a fool.”

Mohun Das stood all this time with his eyes and mouth wide open, looking from one to the other, every word that was uttered increasing his astonishment and disappointment.

“ Do you pretend to say,” screamed he at last, “ do you pretend to say that I am not to get my money, my fifteen hundred rupees, for which I have toiled night and day ? And do you pretend to say I came to you first ? did you not take me with you from the Char Minar ? ”

“ Nay, here is the Char Minar again ; for the sake of Alla,” said I to the clerk, “ if you really know this fellow advise him to be quiet ; what have I, who am a soldier, to do with his

filthy traffic; he may provoke a patient man once too often, and people with weapons in their hands are not safe persons to play jokes with;” and I twisted up my mustachios.

I have told you, Sahib, what a coward the fellow was: he fell instantly on the ground and rubbed his forehead against the floor.

“Pardon! pardon!” he cried, “most brave sirs! anything, whatever you choose to give me, even ten rupees, will be thankfully received, but do not kill me, do not put me to death;—see, I fall at your feet, I rub my nose in the dust.”

“You fool,” cried the clerk, holding his sides with laughter, for he was a fat man; “you fool; ah, Mohun Das, that I should have seen this! In the name of Narayun, who will do you any harm? Are you a child—you, with those mustachios? Shame on you, man; dull as you are, be something less of a coward; get up, ask for your money boldly, ask for whatever these gentlemen please to give you, though indeed you deserve nothing for your impertinent attempt at deception.”

He got up and stood on his left leg, with the sole of the right foot against the calf, his hands joined, his turban all awry, and the expression of his face most ludicrously miserable.

"Ten rupees, my lord," he faltered out; "your slave will take ten rupees."

We all once more burst into a peal of laughter; the Gomashtha's sides appeared to ache, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Ai Bhugwan! Ai Narayun!" cried he, catching his breath; "that I should have seen this; Ai Sitaram! but it is most amusing. Ten rupees! why, man," said he to the miserable Dullal, "you just now wanted fifteen hundred!"

"Nay," said my father, "let him have his due; you said one hundred and fifty,—that he shall have; do you, Meer Sahib, go with this worthy sahoukar to his kothee, and bring the money; I dare say he will give you a guard back, and you can hire a porter for the gold and silver."

"Certainly, you shall have the men," said the Gomashtha: "and now come along; I shall have to collect the gold, and it may be late before it can be weighed and delivered to you, and the rupees passed by a suraff."

As we went on, the Dullal said to me, "You will pay me at the kothee, will you not?"

"We will see," said I; "the money is none of mine, and I will ask advice on the subject."

"Not your money! whose then?"

"Why his who has employed you, and from whom you are to get one hundred and fifty rupees," I said: "are you a fool? why do you ask?"

"Ah nothing, only I was thinking—"

"Thinking of what?" I asked; "some rascality I doubt not."

"Ah," said he, "now you speak as you did at the Char Minar."

"By Alla!" said I, stopping and looking at him, "if ever you mention that word again"—

"Never, never!" cried the wretch, trembling; "do not beat me; remember it is the open street, and there will be a disturbance; the words escaped me unawares, just as I was thinking—"

"That is twice you have said that, and by Alla! I think you have some meaning in it; what *would* you be at?"

"Nothing, nothing," said he; "only I was thinking—"

"Well!"

"I was only thinking that you are an adventurer, who has accompanied that rich merchant from Hindostan."

"Well, and what of that? you knew that before."

“You are not rich?”

“No indeed,” said I, “I am not.”

“Then,” said the wretch, “why not both of us enrich ourselves?”

“How?” I asked.

“Refuse the guard, or take some men I will guide you to; they will do whatever you like for five rupees a piece; we will fly with the money, and there is a place in the rocks close to this where I have plunder hidden—we will go thither and share it.”

“Where is the place you allude to—is it far?” I asked.

“No,” said he; “will you come? I can show it you from a distance; we need not get up the rocks—there is danger of being seen in the daytime.”

I followed him for a little distance, and he pointed to a huge pile of rocks at the back of the Karwan and Begum Bazar.

“There, do you see a white spot about half way up on a rock?”

“I do,” said I.

“That is the spot,” he replied; “it is known but to myself and a few others; whatever I can pick up I put there.”

“What do you get?”

“Ah, little enough; sometimes a shawl, a brocade handkerchief, or some gold, anything in fact. But why do you ask? will you do what I said and join us? there are sixteen of us; one is yonder disguised as a fakeer, the rest are hard by and will accompany us.”

“Dog!” cried I, dashing him to the earth, “dog! dost thou know to whom thou speakest? Here there is no one,” (for we had got to the back of the houses,) “and it were an easy task to send thee to Jehanum; one blow of my sword, and that false tongue would cease to speak for ever:” and I half drew it. I knew the effect this would have: there was the same grovelling cowardice he had displayed before; he clung to my knees; I spurned him and spit on him. “Reptile!” cried I at length, wearied by his abjectness, “I would scorn to touch thee; a Syud of Hindostan is too proud to stoop to such game as thou art; lead me to the Sahoukar, for by Alla I distrust thee!”

“Nay, in this matter I have been honest,” said the wretch; “the money is sure.”

“It will be well for thee that it is,” said I, “o. I swear to be revenged; lead on, and beware how you go; if I see one attempt at

escape I will cut you in two, were it in the middle of the bazar."

"Then follow me closely," said he; and he gathered up his garments, which had become disordered, and we again entered the crowded bazar.

We were soon at the Sahoukar's, who awaited us: the money and gold were told out, and a receipt I had brought with me given, and accompanied by the guard of soldiers I took the treasure to my father.

"Meer Sahib, kind Meer Sahib," said the Dullal, as we approached our dwelling, "you will forget all that has passed; Bhugwan knows I was only jesting with you; I love to play such tricks,—nay, I have always been of a jesting disposition;" and he laughed in his terror. "You will not forget my little perquisite, my hundred and fifty rupees, I know you will not."

"Peace!" cried I, "if you wish to get a cowree. Has it not been promised to thee on the word of two of the faithful? thou shalt get the uttermost farthing."

I dismissed the sepoy with a small present when the money had been lodged in our strong-room, and as they went, the miserable Dullal looked after them as though he thought with

them had departed his last chance for existence. It certainly drew to a close.

“Give me my money and let me depart,” said he in a hollow voice.

“Wait,” said I, “till it is counted out for you.”

“Ah, I had forgotten the Dullaljee,” cried my father ; “I will get out his due.”

CHAPTER III.

“Cheel ke ghur men, mas ka dhér.”—*Hindee Proverb.*
There’s always meat in a kite’s nest.—*Free transl.*

MY father counted out the money and handed it over to the Dullal; his countenance brightened as he viewed it, and he made numberless salams and protestations of thanks. “Now you must write a receipt for the money,” said my father.

“Surely,” replied the fellow, taking a pen out of his turban, “if my lord will give me paper and ink.”

“Here they are,” said I; “write.”

He did so, gave me the paper, and tied the money up in a corner of his dhotee, which he tucked into his waistband. “Have I permission

to depart?" he asked; "my lord knows the poor Dullal, and that he has behaved honestly in this transaction. Whenever my lord returns to Hyderabad, he can always hear of Mohun Das, if he inquires at the Char Minar; and he will always be ready to exert himself in his patron's service."

"Stay," said I, "I have somewhat to say to thee;" and I related to my father the whole of the conversation I have just described.

"Is it so?" said he to the miserable being before him; "is it so? speak, wretch! let me hear the truth from thy own lips; wouldst thou have robbed me?"

But the creature he addressed was mute; he stood paralysed by fear and conscious guilt, his eyes starting from his head, his mouth open, and his blanched lips drawn tightly across his teeth.

"Thou hast deserved it," continued my father; "I read in that vile face of thine deeds of robbery, of murder, of knavery and villainy of every kind; thou must die!"

"Ah, no, no! Die? my lord is pleased to be facetious; what has his poor slave done?" and he grinned a ghastly smile.

"Thou wouldst have robbed me," said my

father, "when I trusted thee with my whole substance ; thou wouldst have left me to starve in a strange land without compunction ; thou hast robbed others, and cheated thousands : say, art thou fit to live, to prey longer upon the world thou hast already despoiled ?"

He threw himself at my father's feet ; he grasped his knees ; he could scarcely speak, and was fearfully convulsed and agitated by extreme terror. "I am all that you say," he cried, "thief, murderer, and villain ; but oh ! do not kill me. My lord's face is kind—I cannot die—and my lord has no sword, and how will he kill me ?" He had only just perceived that we were both unarmed, and he made a sudden rush at the door. "The Kotwal shall know of this," he cried ; "people are not to be terrified with impunity." The door was fastened ; he gave several desperate pulls and pushes at it ; but I was at his back, and the fatal handkerchief was over his head : he turned round and glared on me—the next instant he was dead at my feet.

"There," cried my father exultingly, "judgement has overtaken him, and the memory of his crimes will sleep with him for ever ; we have done a good deed."

"Yes," said I, "a good one indeed ; he con-

fessed himself to be a murderer, robber, and knave—what more need you? and so young too for this accumulation of crime!”

“Drag him in here,” said my father, “I like not to look on him; and go for the Luggaees; he must be buried at night in the small yard of the house; I dare not have the body carried out in this crowded city.”

“It shall be done,” I replied; “but think what an escape we have had; had you not told me to go with the wretch, we should have lost our money.”

“Yes, my son, and even had we got it, had you not suspected that five per cent was too much, I should certainly have paid the sum; but I saw your drift, and I think took up the clue admirably. We have cheated the knave both out of his money and his life.”

“True,” said I, “it has been a good adventure, and amusing withal; besides it promises further advantage.”

“From the rock and the fakeer?”

“Yes; there will be good booty.”

“Take care,” said my father; “the band may be there, and they will give you a warm reception.”

“I will go and consult with Bhudrinath,”

said I; "the adventure will just suit him and Surfuraz Khan; we will do nothing rashly."

Bhudrinath was at the serai waiting for me.

"So, Meer Sahib," said he, "you are still in the humour for a frolic; how many lives will satisfy your worship to night? there is no lack of men in this abode of villainy."

"I am in the humour," said I, "but not for what I intended; I have better game in view."

"Ha!" said he, "so *you* have been acting Sotha; and pray what may this game be?"

"One that will require stout hearts, and may be naked weapons," I replied: "are you willing to accompany me?"

"To death," said Bhudrinath; "but I cannot for my life see what you are driving at."

"Listen," I replied; and I related to him the whole history of the Dullal.

"Cleverly done, very cleverly indeed, my young jemadar," said he, when my relation was ended; "no one could have managed it better from first to last; the rascal deserved his fate; and now I suppose we must search out these hidden treasures in the rock."

"Exactly," said I; "I would do so this very night if I knew how to go about it properly."

“Let me see,” said Bhudrinath musing; “we shall not want many men, six or eight resolute fellows will be sufficient. You and I, Peer Khan, Motee-ram, and four others are ample; there is no use waiting for Surfuraz Khan, he will not now be back before the morning. But how to get intelligence of the place, and whether any of the rascals are there at night?”

“Can no one personate a fakeer?” said I; “a kulundur, anything will do. He might go up now, as the spot is close by, and bring us news in an hour or so.”

“I have it!” cried Bhudrinath. “Here, some one call Shekhjee to me.”

Shekhjee came. He was an old man, with a long beard; but he was an able fellow and a rare good hand with the handkerchief.

“Shekhjee,” said Bhudrinath, “sit down, I have something to say to you. You can personate a fakeer if necessary, can you not?”

“Certainly,” replied the old fellow, “Moosulman or Hindoo, all kinds are familiar to me. I know all their forms of speech and have many of their dresses.”

“It is well,” said Bhudrinath; “now listen. You must go and disguise yourself this in-

stant; we have an enterprise in view;" and he related our purposed scheme and what had preceded it. "And now," continued Bhudrinath, "you must be wary, and by dark you must return and tell us of the place and if there are men there."

"Is the fakeer who lives there a Hindoo or Moosulman?"

"I saw the impression of spread hands in whitewash on the rock, so he must be a Moosulman," said I.

"Then I know how to act," cried the Thug. "Sahibs, I take my leave, and will not fail you. I shall be with you by the time I am required."

"Will he manage it?" I asked of Bhudrinath. "Methinks it is a delicate business."

"Never fear him," said Bhudrinath; "he is a most accomplished rogue and is a capital hand at disguise, especially as a fakeer, and once got us considerable booty by enticing five Nanukshae fakeers among us who had picked up a good deal of money and were going to build a well with it. Besides, he is as brave as a lion, and you have seen his other work."

As we were talking Surfuraz Khan came in.

"Ours has been a good business," he cried

exultingly, "and there is good spoil. We have killed all the men; and the plunder is coming in charge of our fellows."

"That is so far good," said I; "but is there any ready money, or is it all goods?"

"Both, Meer Sahib, both; but methinks you need not be so ready to ask, when we have not seen your face ever since we have been in the city. We might all have been taken and safely lodged in Puntoo Lall's huwélee for all you knew of the matter. I do not like such conduct."

I was enraged at his speech, and was about making an angry reply when Bhudrinath interfered.

"Peace!" said he, "no brawls: it is disgraceful and only fit for drunkards and smokers of ganja; listen to me. Surfuraz Khan, you are no boy, and ought not to let your anger have sway; listen, and hear what our young jemadar has been about, and I swear by Bhowanee I think he will yet put us all to shame."

He then related all I had told him, on hearing which Surfuraz Khan's angry feelings gave way in a moment; he rose and embraced me.

"I was wrong," said he, "and you must forgive me; and to prove that I am more than

ever your friend, I beg you to allow me a place in this adventure, for, by Alla! it promises to be a strange one."

"Willingly," said I; "we thought you would not arrive in time, but now you are come I would not on any account that you did not accompany us."

"So you have strangled the fellows you took out," said Bhudrinath. "Had you any trouble?"

"None whatever," replied the Khan. "We took them out on the Masulipatam road, and found a spot on the other side of Surroonuggur; we threw the bodies into a well and returned by another road. Soobhan Alla! this is a rare place, and we might remain here for years and have some amusement every day. I think I shall stay here."

"You may do as you please about that," said I, "when we have shared the spoil we have got. You will then be free, but I should be sorry to lose you."

In such conversation we continued till it was dusk, and then assembling the men we intended to take, eight in all, and seeing that our arms were in good order, we waited in great anxiety for the return of our emissary.

At last he came.

“There is no time to be lost,” said he. “I went up to the place and found the Fakeer. He is a fine sturdy young fellow, and at first warned me to descend; but when I told him I was hungry and weary, that I had just arrived from Hindostan, and did not know where to lay my head, and begged for a crust of bread and water in the name of the Twelve Imaums, he was pacified, and admitted me into his cave, gave me some food and a hookah, and we sat carousing for some time. I pulled out my opium-box and took a very little; seeing it he begged for some, and has taken such a dose that he will not wake till morning. I left him fast asleep.”

“He shall never wake again,” said I: “but did you observe the place? Where can the plunder be hidden?”

“He lives in a cave, between two enormous rocks,” said Shekhjee. “It was nearly all in darkness, but I saw a corner at the back of it built up with mud and stones, which he said was his sleeping-place, and I suspect it is there that the plunder is concealed.”

“Come then,” said I; “there is not a moment to be lost; if we delay we may chance to

find the rest of the gang. This is just the hour at which they are all out in the bazars, stealing what they can."

We all sallied out, and conducted by our guide, crept stealthily along the foot of the rocks till we gained the narrow pathway by which we were to ascend.

We held a moment's conference in whispers, and bidding five of the men stay below until we should tell them to ascend, Bhudrinath, myself, and Surfuraz Khan crept up the narrow track to the mouth of the cave, whither the old Thug had preceded us.

"He still sleeps," said he in a whisper; "but tread softly, lest you wake him. He lies yonder, close by the lamp."

"Mind, he is mine," said I to Bhudrinath; "do you and Surfuraz Khan hold him;" for as I looked on the powerful form before me, I felt this precaution to be necessary. But he slept; how was I to throw the roomal about his neck? Bhudrinath solved the difficulty; he gave the Fakeer a smart blow with the flat of his sheathed sword upon the stomach, and the fellow started up to a sitting posture.

"What is this? Thieves!" was all he could

say; my handkerchief was ready, and now it never failed me—he was dead in an instant.

“Now trim the lamp,” said I to Bhudrinath. “Call up three of the men, and let the others remain below to look out.”

Bhudrinath tore a piece of rag off the clothes of the dead Fakeer, which he twisted up into a thick wick and put into the oil vessel; its strong glare lighted up the interior of the cave, and we saw everything distinctly.

“Here is the wall which I spoke of,” said Shekhjee, “and we had better search behind it.”

We did so. There were piles of earthen jars in one corner, which we at first supposed to contain grain or flour, and indeed the first two we uncovered had rice and dāl in them; the third felt heavy.

“This has something in it beyond rice,” said I; “examine it closely.” The mouth was stuffed with rags, but when they were removed we beheld it filled with money—rupees and pice mixed together.

“This was not wise,” said Bhudrinath; “the Shah Sahib ought not to have mixed his copper and silver, the silver will be tarnished; but we can clean it.”

The next pot was the same : the last was the best ; it was full of gold and silver ornaments, rings, anklets, and armlets. We shuddered to see that many of them were stained with blood.

“ The villains ! ” I exclaimed ; “ that wretch then told the truth when he confessed himself to be a murderer ; the city is well rid of him. But we must not stand talking. Do one of ye tie these things up and be ready for a start, while we look out for further spoil.”

But there was nothing else in this corner, no bales of cloth or other articles as we had expected. We were looking about to find any other place of concealment, and had nearly given up our search, when Surfuraz Khan, who had gone outside, called to us.

“ Come here,” he cried ; “ there is a place here which looks suspicious.”

We ran to the spot, and found the hole he had discovered to be between two rocks ; it was dark within, and a man could but just enter by crawling upon his hands and knees.

“ Give me the light,” said I ; “ I will enter it if the devil were inside.”

“ Better the devil than any of this infernal gang,” said Bhudrinath to me as I entered.

I found no one, and the space within, which

was so low that I could scarcely stand upright, was filled with bundles.

“Neither the devil nor any of the gang are here,” cried I to those outside, “so do some of you come in quickly and see what I have found.”

I set myself to work, as did also the others, to untie the different bundles, and we were all busily employed. I had just opened one which contained, as I thought, brass cooking-pots and water-vessels, and was overjoyed to find some gold and others silver, when the alarm was given from outside. We all got out as quickly as we could and inquired the cause.

“There are two men,” said the scouts, “whom we have watched come round the corner of the houses yonder and approach the bottom of the rocks ; they do not walk fast, and appear to be carrying loads of something.”

“Only two,” said I, “then they are easily managed. Put out the light, and conceal yourselves at the entrance of the cave ; we must fall upon them as they enter.”

We had just taken our posts behind a rock which was close to the mouth, our roomals ready, and two with their swords drawn, when one of the fellows called out, “Ho ! Sein ! Sein !

come down and help us up. Here we are, laden like Pulla-wallas, and thou hast not even a light to show us the way."

"Not a word," said I, "as you value your lives. Let them come."

"May his mother be defiled!" said the other fellow. "The beast is drunk in his den and does not hear us. I will settle with him for this."

I suppose he stumbled and fell, for there was another series of execrations at the Fakeer, the load, and the stones; but in a few moments more they both reached the platform and threw down their bundles, which clanked as they fell.

"Where is this drunken rascal?" said one, a tall fellow as big as the one we had killed. "No light for us, and I warrant the brute has either smoked himself dead drunk or is away at the Bhung-khana just when he is wanted."

The other sat down, apparently fairly tired and out of breath.

"Go inside," said he; "you will find the lamp and cruse of oil behind the wall. I will not stir an inch."

The first speaker entered, cursing and abusing the Fakeer. Surfuraz Khan and I rushed on

him and despatched him; but the other hearing the scuffle cried out and attempted to escape. He was not fated to do so however; his foot slipped, or he stumbled over one of the bundles he had brought, and fell, and before he could rise had received his death-wound by a cut in the neck from one of the men behind the rock, who darted out upon him.

“Enough of this work,” said I; “we had better be off; first however let us pay one more visit to the hole and get what we can, and do one of you see what is in the bundles.”

We again entered the hole, and each taking a bundle we got out. Those the fellows had brought only contained cooking-pots and a few cloths, so we left them behind, and made the best of our way to the serai laden with our booty.

I have forgotten to tell you, Sahib, how many more proofs we discovered in that cave of the bloody trade of these villains. Many of the bundles were of wearing apparel, and most of them covered with blood; one that I opened was quite saturated, and as the still wet gore stuck to my fingers, I dropped it with mingled disgust and horror.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW SURFURAZ KHAN AND HIS PARTY GOT INTO A
SCRAPE, AND HOW THEY WERE EXTRICATED THEREFROM.

WHEN we returned we had a good laugh over our success. The adventure was novel to us all, and we pictured to ourselves the mortification and chagrin of the robbers, when they should arrive, at finding their stronghold plundered of all its valuables, and their friends lying dead at the threshold, instead of being ready to receive them and recount their adventures of the evening.

As a better place of security, I took the jewels and silver vessels I had found to our house and locked them up in the strong-room, to be disposed of afterwards as best they might be.

My father, I need not say, was overpowered

with joy, and every new feat that I performed seemed to render me more dear to him. He caressed me as though I had still been a child.

“Wait till these actions are known in Hindostan, my son,” said he with enthusiasm; “I am much mistaken indeed if they do not raise you to a rank which has been attained by few, that of Subadar.”

I did not reply to him, but I made an inward determination to venture everything to attain it. I was aware that nothing but a very successful expedition, coupled with large booty and a deed of some notoriety and daring, could raise me to the rank my father had mentioned; but that it could be attained I had no doubt, since others had reached it before me;—and why should not I, whose whole soul was bent upon winning fame through deeds which men should tremble to hear?

Two days after our adventure at the robbers’ cave, the whole of the Karwan and adjacent neighbourhood were thrown into great excitement from the discovery of the dead bodies by their smell and the number of vultures they attracted. Various were the conjectures as to the perpetrators of the violent deed, and many attributed it to the treachery of some of the band

of robbers; however, all agreed that a great benefit had been done by unknown agents. Much of the stolen property was recovered; among it was some of great value which had been stolen from a sahoukar a short time before, and which in our hurry and confusion had escaped us; but, as it was, we had got a considerable booty. All the gold and silver was secretly melted into lumps by one of our men who understood how to do it, and it was valued by weight at upwards of seven thousand rupees.

On a general division of the proceeds of the booty being proposed, which amounted in a gross sum, by the sale of the camels, horses, bullocks, carts, and various valuables, to about fifty thousand rupees, all the Thugs agreed that it had better be reserved until the return of the expedition to our village; and meanwhile twenty rupees were disbursed to each inferior, and fifty to each jemadar, for their present wants. My father now talked of leaving the city; but I entreated a further stay of ten days, as, in concert with Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan, I had laid out a plan for dividing our gang into four portions, one to take post on each side of the city, and to exercise our voca-

tion separately, the proceeds to be deposited as collected in one place, and to be divided when we could no longer carry on our work.

The plan was favourably received by him, and that day it was put into execution. We paid the trifling rent of our house, and on the pretence that we were about to leave the city and return to Hindostan, quitted the Karwan and took up our quarters on the other side, in a suburb which bordered upon the Meer Joomla tank. Bhudrinath and his party went into the Chud-dar Ghat bazar, near the magnificent mansion of the Resident, as, being a grand thoroughfare, it was frequented by numerous travellers, and from thence branched off many roads, both to the north and east. Surfuraz Khan with eight men continued at the Karwan, as he was less known than we were. Another larger party took post on the western road from the city towards Shumshabad, under Peer Khan and Motee-ram, who were resolved by their exertions to merit the trust which had been confided to them.

Our plan succeeded wonderfully ; not a day passed in which the destruction of several parties was not reported, and though the booty gained was inconsiderable, yet it was probably

as much as we could expect, and it was all collected and deposited in our new abode, from whence my father disposed of such as met a ready sale.

I pass over my own share in these little affairs. I had thought, when I selected the quarter I did, that there would have been more work than turned out to be the case; I was disappointed in the small share which fell to my lot, in despite of my utmost exertions to the contrary, and entreated Bhudrinath or Surfuraz Khan to exchange places with me; they however would not; they had laid their own plans, and as I had myself selected my station I had no right to any other, nor ought I to have been dissatisfied.

It was very early in the morning of the eighth day after we had commenced operations, that Bhudrinath came to me in great alarm.

“We must fly,” said he; “the city is no longer safe for us.”

“How?” I asked in astonishment; “what has happened? Has aught been discovered, or have any of the band proved faithless and denounced us?”

“I will tell you,” replied Bhudrinath; “it is a sad affair—some of our best men are taken

and in confinement. You know Surfuraz Khan to be daring, far beyond the bounds of discretion, and that for this reason few hitherto have liked to trust themselves to his guidance; and but for this fault he would ere now have been one of our leading jemadars, for he is a Thug by descent of many generations, and his family has always been powerful."

"But the matter," cried I impatiently; "what in the name of Shitan have we to do with his ancestors? By Alla! you are as bad as a"—

"Nay, I was not going to make a story about it," said Bhudrinath mildly, for nothing could provoke him, "so do not lose your temper; but listen. Surfuraz Khan then yesterday evening had got hold of two sahoukars, who were on the eve of departure for Aurungabad; he persuaded them to put up in the serai with him, and they were to start the next morning. They were supposed to be rich, as their effects in two panniers were brought into the serai, and carefully watched by them. By some unlucky chance, just as the evening set in, they were visited by two or three other merchants whom they seemed to know, and who persuaded them to wait for another week, and to join them in

their journey up the country. To the extreme mortification of Surfuraz Khan they agreed to the proposal; but as they said there would be danger in removing their bags from the serai at night, they told their friends they would sleep there, and join them in the morning. Surfuraz Khan I hear made every exertion by persuasion to induce them to alter their determination, but in vain. So you know there remained but one alternative, which was to put them to death in the serai, and to dispose of the bodies as well as they could; besides, the circumstance of the men being afraid to risk their bags by removal at night, looked as though they were of value. I must own, Meer Sahib, it was tempting; it would even have been so for you or me,—how much more for the Khan! Had he even waited till towards morning, done the business, and started, leaving the bodies where they were, he could have got clean off with the booty, which was large, and he could have come round the back of the city and joined you or me; any one of us could have taken his post in the Karwan, and no one would have been at all suspicious. But no, he did not reflect; the men were killed almost immediately after their friends left, and their bags plundered: as it is, we have got some

of the spoil in the shape of two strings of pearls, but the best are gone."

"And how was the matter discovered? you have not said."

"Why," continued Bhudrinath, "one of the sahoukars' friends shortly after returned with a message; Surfuraz Khan made some excuse that they had gone out, but would soon return. The fellow waited for a long time; but at last growing suspicious he went away, and returned with the others, who insisted upon a search for their friends. Surfuraz Khan had contrived to bury the bodies in the yard, but some articles were found on his person which the others positively swore to, as also the bags in which they had been; and the upshot of the whole was, that they were all marched off to the city by a guard which was summoned from somewhere or other for the purpose, except one of them, by name Himmat Khan, one of Surfuraz's own people, who happened to be absent."

"It is a sad business truly," said I, "and I do not exactly see what is to be done to extricate them."

"Nor I," replied Bhudrinath; "but this evil comes of not taking the omens, nor attending properly to them when they are taken."

“Nonsense!” said I; “you are always prating about these foolish omens, as if success lay more in them than in stout hearts and cunning plans. I believe them not.”

“You will rue it then one day or other,” said Bhudrinath; “depend upon it you will rue it; I tell you I could mention a hundred instances of the disastrous effects of disregard of omens, and what I say will be readily confirmed by your father.”

“Pooh,” said I, “he is as superstitious and absurd as yourself; why do you not make your lamentations on my want of faith to him, instead of troubling me with them?”

“I would,” he replied, “but that he seems to have given over the charge of the whole expedition to you, and to have forgotten his station as the leader and conductor. Did any one ever hear of a whole band being separated, and each pursuing a separate course, without the omens being taken, or a solemn sacrifice offered to Bhowanee?”

“I thought you had performed all the rites you seem to think so necessary,” said I sneeringly; “and if you have not, to whom else have we to look but to you, who are the Nishan-burdar? By Alla and his Prophet! Bhudrinath,

methinks you have deceived us all ; and," said I, my anger rising, " I bid you beware how you speak of my father as you have done ; remember that I am able and willing to avenge any word which may be spoken against him, and I will do it."

"Young man," said Bhudrinath gravely, "you well know me to be one who never enters into idle brawls or quarrels, and these angry words of yours are wasted ; keep them I pray you for those who will gratify you by taking offence at them—to me they are trifles. Your placing no dependence upon the omens which have been considered by Thugs both of your faith and mine to be essential to our success, is only attributable to your inexperience ; the necessary offerings have been neglected by us, and behold the punishment. Though at present it has fallen lightly upon us, there is no saying how soon the whole of us may be in danger ; suppose any of those taken are put to the torture and denounce us, how could we escape?"

"Then what do you counsel?" said I.

"I would first propose an offering to Bhovane, and then such measures for the deliverance of those who have been seized as may be hereafter determined on by us all."

“Perform the ceremonies by all means,” said I; “you and my father know how to do so; my ignorance might mar your object, so I will keep away from you till they are over.”

“You are right, it might, and I am glad to hear you at length speak reasonably: where is your father?”

“You will find him asleep within,” said I, “and you had better go to him.”

Sahib, the sacrifices were made, the omens watched, and declared to be favourable. What they were I know not; I cared so little about these ceremonies then, that I did not go near them, or even ask what had been done. It was only in after days that their value and importance were impressed upon me by a series of misfortunes, which were no doubt sent to check my presumption; since then my faith in them has been steadfast, as you shall hereafter learn.

My father and Bhudrinath returned to me with joyful countenances. “Bhowanee is propitious,” said they, “in spite of this little display of her anger: the truth is, we had in some manner neglected her, but she is now satisfied.”

“Since that is the case,” said I, “we had better be stirring and doing something for the

poor fellows; but what to do I know not. When did you say they were seized, Bhudrinath?"

"About the middle of the night."

"Then they are now in confinement somewhere or other, and it will be impossible to effect their release by day: a bribe I dare not offer, for they say Hussein Ali Khan, the Kotwal, is an upright man. When is it likely they will be brought before him?"

"I know not," said Bhudrinath, "but it can easily be ascertained;" and he went into the street, and soon returned: "I asked an old Bunnea the question, or rather at what time the Kotwal held his durbar, and he told me in the first and second watches of the night."

"Then," said I, "they must be rescued by force, and I will do it."

"Impossible!" cried both at once.

"But I tell you I will do it," said I: "where is Himmat Khan? with him and six of our best men I will do it, if they will stand by me. Do any of them know the Kotwal's house?"

They were summoned, but none knew it.

"Then," said I, "I will go even now and find it out, and will return when my plan is perfected."

“And I will go and bring some of my men,” said Bhudrinath; “I will be back by noon.”

“See that they bring their swords and shields, Bhudrinath; some of them may volunteer to accompany me.”

“I will do so for one, Meer Sahib; I have confidence in you in spite of your want of faith;” and he laughed.

“I understand you,” said I; “you forgive me?”

“Certainly; did I ever quarrel with you?”

“No indeed, though you had cause; I was foolish.”

“Why, what is all this?” said my father; “you have not surely been offended with each other?”

“It is nothing,” I replied, “for you see the end of it; but I am losing time, I must depart.”

I went into the city, and easily got a person to show me the Kotwal's habitation. It was in a long, narrow street, which did not appear much of a thoroughfare. This exactly suited my purpose, for we could have done little in a crowded place. It seemed very practicable to surprise the men who should escort our friends, and I had no doubt, if suddenly attacked, they

would scamper off, and leave their prisoners to their fate.

I returned and laid the result of my inquiries before my father. He was not averse to the undertaking, but was in much alarm at the prominent part I should have to play, and the chance of our being defeated.

“But,” said he, “my son, these thoughts are the cowardly ones which affection often suggests, and Alla forbid they should have any effect with you : go, in the name of the Prophet, to whose protection I commend you.”

Towards evening therefore, myself, Bhudri-nath, and six others, two of whom were Rajpoots, who swore to die rather than come back unsuccessful, went into the city. We separated, but kept in view of each other, and they all followed me to the street in which the Kotwal resided. There we lounged about for some hours, and I grew very impatient. Would they ever come? had they even before this been tried, condemned, and cast into prison? were questions I asked myself a thousand times. That the durbar was being held I knew by the number of persons who went in and came out of the house, but still there was no sign of our brethren.

I was sitting listlessly in the shop of a Tum-bole, almost the only one in the street, when Himmat Khan came up to me. I saw by his face that he had news, and descended from the chubootra upon which the man exposed his goods, and turned round a dark corner.

"They come," said he, panting for breath from anxiety; "I have been watching one end of the street and Khoseal Sing the other: they are coming by my end, and will be now about half way up."

"And by whom are they guarded?" I asked.

"Oh," said he, "a parcel of Line-wallas, about twenty soldiers with old muskets; we could cut through a hundred of them."

"Have they their bayonets fixed?" I inquired.

"They have; but what of that? they are cowardly rascals, and you will see will run away."

"Then," said I, "run and tell Bhudrinath, who is yonder; tell him to walk down that side, I will go down this; when we are near them I will give the jhirnee."

My four men had now joined me, as I told them to do if they saw me speak to any one:

Bhudrinath was joined by his, and by Khoseal Sing, who had given up his watch at the other end and arrived at the critical moment. Our parties proceeded down the street exactly opposite to each other. I thought not of danger, though it was the first time I had ever drawn a sword in anger against a fellow-creature, and I was about to precipitate myself into what might be a sudden and desperate combat. Our shields apparently hung loosely and easily on our arms, but they were tightly grasped, and our swords were free in their scabbards. I saw the party approach; they marched carelessly, and had not the arms of my companions been tightly bound, and the whole tied together by a rope, which the leader of the party held in his hand, they might have easily escaped.

Our men joined together in the middle of the street, and when we were close to the coming party, I cried in a loud tone, "Bhaee Pān lāo!" It was the signal—our swords flashed from their scabbards, and we threw ourselves on the sepoy. I cut right and left, and two men fell; the others were as successful: I rushed to the prisoners, and a few strokes of my sword and of those who were nearest cut their bonds and they were free. As Himmat

Khan had said, the whole of the sepoy's fled on the instant of the attack.

"Fly to the gates, my brothers, or they will be shut!" I cried; "fly through these narrow dark streets; no one will know who you are nor trouble themselves about you."

We all dispersed in an instant. I cast a hurried look around me as I returned my bloody sword into its scabbard, and saw five poor wretches lying on the ground and groaning. It was enough: I too fled down the nearest street which offered, reached the gate I had entered by, and when I got on the embankment of the Meer Joomla tank, I plunged among the gardens and inclosures which are below it, and by the various lanes which led through them soon reached my father's house.

The attack on the escort of the prisoners, Sahib, was so sudden and over so quickly, that I can give you but a faint idea how soon it was made and finished: it occupied less time than I have taken to tell it, and I have often wondered since that the noise and confusion, not only caused by us, but by a few passengers who witnessed the fray, did not alarm the whole street, and cause the inhabitants to rise on us.

By morning all our companions were present at the different places of rendezvous: but thinking we were no longer safe about the city, my father sent them all out of the way to the camp at Hassain Sagor, where he bid them wait, for we knew that it would never be searched for us.

Nothing now remained to detain us but to dispose of the plunder we had gained during the last ten days, and there was none of much value; a few strings of pearls, several shawls, and some unset precious stones were the best, and they were soon sold: the gold and silver as before had been melted down.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL PERCEIVE THAT AMEER ALI
PASSED A BUSY AFTERNOON.

I HAD now only two matters on my hands ; one to discover Zora if I could, the other to endeavour to get the bills of exchange I had brought with me cashed.

Of the first I had but little hope ; for since the day I went to her house, although I had constantly men on the watch about it, I could discover nothing of her or of the old nurse ; the latter I had bribed handsomely, and I knew if it was possible to convey to me any information of her I loved, she would do so. I had several times passed the house myself in the hope of seeing Zora by some accident or other ; but it was in vain ; and at the time I now speak of, I had almost given her up in despair. Had it

not been, Sahib, for the wild interest of my trade, I should have sunk into apathy and wretchedness, so fondly, so deeply did I love her. It was this which rescued me from myself, for I could not be behind the rest in seeking adventures; and once that I had a band entirely under my own direction, I was incessantly occupied in finding employment for it, and taking my own part in the catastrophes which ensued.

The day after the rescue of our brethren we held a consultation, at which the principal members of the band were present. I need not relate particulars; suffice it to say, that all agreed in thinking we had remained long enough consistently with our safety, and it was resolved to depart in the course of the next day, or at most the day after. One by one the parties, as they were then divided, were to take the nearest road towards Beeder, which led through Puttuncherloo; and the last-mentioned place was to be the rendezvous whence we should proceed in company.

Little time therefore remained to me; and as soon as I possibly could I took Bhudrinath and Motee-ram with me, and we went into the city. We sat down on the steps of the Char Minar.

Wonderful indeed were the stories we heard of our skirmish with the Kotwal's soldiers; the accounts of the killed and wounded on each side were ludicrously inconsistent, and you may imagine how we enjoyed the various relations we heard, all either from persons who declared they had been eye-witnesses of the matter, or who had heard it from undoubted authority. But it was not our errand to waste time by listening to idle tales, not one of which contained a word of truth, but to get the money for the bills we had found among the effects of Syud Mahomed Ali, alias Kumal Khan, and we had repaired to the Char Minar as the most likely place to meet with a person who could read them, and without suspicion tell us upon whom they were drawn.

Observing as we sat a miserable half-starved-looking wretch, with a pen stuck between his turban and his ear, an ink-bottle hanging by his side, and a roll of paper under his arm, I fixed upon him as a likely person to suit our purpose. I beckoned to him, and he ran eagerly towards us. "Canst thou read Goozerattee?" I asked.

"Noble sir, I can not only read but write it,

for it is my native tongue ; what are my lord's commands ?”

“Simply,” said I, “to read a hoondee—no great matter ;” and I handed him one of the bills.

“It is an order, Sahib, drawn in favour of Kumal Khan, (my lord's name I presume,) by Bearee Mul of Nandair, upon Gopal Chund Bisn Chund of the Begum Bazar, for four hundred rupees, at nine days' sight.”

“Is it correctly drawn ?” I asked.

The fellow looked at the bill, and turned it round and round, examining every part of it.

“Does your worship suspect it ?”

“Alla forbid !” said I ; “for if it is wrong, I and these worthy associates of mine are ruined, for we have more like it, and for larger sums.”

“I see nothing wrong in the bill,” said the man ; “but let me see the others.” I showed them.

“They are all correct,” said he ; “you have only to take them for acceptance, and you are sure of your money.”

“Is the firm upon whom they are drawn well known ?”

“They have a great deal of country business in hoondees,” said the man, “and are on that account perhaps less known than many of our leading bankers, but nevertheless the firm is most respectable.”

“Where did you say they live?”

“In the Begum Bazar. If your worships wish it I will accompany you thither.”

“Good,” said I, “do so; we are strangers, and might not readily find the house. You shall be rewarded for your trouble.”

We went out of the city by a small gate at the end of a street which led down from the Char Minar,—I think it is called the Delhi gate,—and turning to the left, after crossing the river, we were soon in the midst of the populous and wealthy suburb in which the bankers we sought resided. The road through the principal street was almost entirely blocked up by bags of grain, bales of merchandise, tethered bullocks belonging to the grain-carriers, and empty carts; and it was as much as we could do to keep together, both from these causes and the crowd of people. The noise too of the crowd, of the buying and selling in the bazar, the curses and execrations of bullock-drivers and unloaders, the cries of men measuring

grain, and a thousand others, made a din and confusion which I had never heard equalled. However, by dint of pushing and elbowing our way, we reached a respectable-looking house, and were introduced to one of the partners by the man we had taken with us.

I put a bold face on the matter, and presented one of the hoondees. The Sahoukar was an old man, and taking a pair of spectacles from a fold in his turban, he placed them on the end of his nose and carefully read the hoondee; he afterwards turned it round and round, and examined it most carefully, looking from time to time most suspiciously at me over his glasses.

I own this would have been unpleasant had I been alone, but with the two companions I had brought with me I cared not; had it come to the worst, our weapons were ready, and we would have used them for our liberty.

“I wish to speak a few words with you, if you will follow me into the next room,” said the Sahoukar, pointing to one which led from that in which we sat. He rose, and I followed him.

“How came you to be possessed of this?” said he anxiously; “and who are you?”

“It matters not who I am,” I replied; “and it must suffice for you to know that I am to receive the money for that hoondée, and for these also;” and I showed him the others.

“Most extraordinary!” he exclaimed after he had examined them. “I cannot understand it. It is most strange that they should be presented by another. Young man, by what authority are you here to receive this money?”

“By his for whom they were drawn,” I replied.

“His name, and the sahoukar’s who drew them?”

“Kumal Khan,—and the sahoukar’s, Bearee Mul.”

“That will not do,” said the Sahoukar; “you have blundered in your errand, young man; the drawer’s name any one could have told you.”

“Perhaps this may enlighten you further upon the subject,” said I, and I took from my waistband the seal of the Syud.

He examined it, and going to a box in the room he took from it a bundle of papers. He turned them over rapidly.

“Ay, here they are,” said he, reading, “‘Accounts of Syud Mahomed Ali’; and now, young man, if there is deceit in that seal it

can be easily proved, for behold the seal of the worthy Syud himself;" and he showed me an impression on one of the papers.

I confess I had been in much suspense, for had I by any unlucky chance got hold of the wrong seal my detection would have certainly followed; but still I had taken the ring from the man's own finger, and it was not likely that he had any other. The instant I saw the impression, however, I was satisfied that it was the right one.

"Now for the proof," said the Sahoukar, rubbing the seal over with ink and wetting a piece of paper with his tongue. "If you have attempted deceit, young man, your detection is certain. Shall I stamp it?"

"Certainly," said I; "I am innocent of any attempt to deceive you. The worthy Syud gave me the seal in order that you might be satisfied."

He pressed the seal to the paper and withdrew it; the impression was perfect, and exactly corresponded with that on the paper of accounts.

"This is correct," he said at length; "though I cannot read Persian, the letters appear the same, and the size is exact. I cannot therefore doubt longer; but still it is most strange."

"I can only say," said I, "that I am the Syud's confidential agent, whom he has sent to you for the money; if you will not pay it, say so, that I may write to him."

"By no means," said the Sahoukar; "the money is here. But why did not the Syud come himself? the bills are made payable to him alone."

"True," said I, "they are; but if you are in his confidence, as you seem to be, you will know that there are good reasons for his absence from the city at present, and as he wanted the money he has sent me for it."

"And where is he?"

"That I cannot tell you," said I; "it can be divulged to no one; suffice it for you to know that when the proper time comes he will emerge from his place of concealment." And I told the truth, Sahib, for will he not rise at the day of judgement?

And Ameer Ali laughed heartily at his own conceit.

"Well," said the Sahoukar, "no doubt remains as to your right to the money. When do you want it? the bills are at nine days' sight."

"Now; I have no time to lose, I must de-

part in the morning. You can deduct the interest for nine days. But stay," I continued, "the Syud told me that if he owed you anything you were to deduct it, and if any balance of his remained in your hands you were to pay it to me."

"Good," replied the Sahoukar; "I will see;" and he turned to his books. "Ah, here is the account. Last balance struck the fifteenth of Suffer, nearly a year ago,—in his favour three hundred and twelve rupees four annas."

"So much the better," said I: "now pay me the moneys and write a receipt; I will sign it with the seal, which I must take back with me."

The Sahoukar called to a man inside.

"Here," said he, "register these hoondees and get the money for them, and make out a receipt. Your name?" said he to me.

"Ameer Ali, an unworthy Syud."

The money was duly counted out, a trifling deduction made for interest, and the whole paid to me. I put my own seal as well as that of the Syud to the receipt, and after seeing the balance in the Sahoukar's books duly cancelled, there was no longer cause to delay.

“How will you carry all that money?” said the Sahoukar; “this is not a safe place for people to be seen out at so late an hour” (for the evening was now closing fast) “with such a sum in their possession.”

“Content yourself,” said I; “we are three stout fellows, and well able to defend our charge.”

“You had better take two of my men, at any rate, to carry the money.”

“I will carry some, if I am permitted,” said the man we had brought with us. “Bhugwan knows I have eaten nothing today, and knew not where to get a meal till these kind gentlemen met me; and I may perhaps earn a trifling sum above what they have promised me.”

“Good,” said I; “how much can you carry?”

“Two thousand rupees,” he replied, “if my lord will try me.”

“Very well, then take up that bag.” The rest we divided between ourselves, and departed. We did not return as we had gone, but avoiding the city, passed by the house of the English Resident, crossed the river below it, and on the other side struck into some close

lanes, which led to the suburb we lived in. As we went along, I said to Bhudrinath in Ramasee, which I had now learned, "That fellow must not live ; our secret is safe with the Sahoukar, but not with another. What do you say?"

"I agree with you," said he. "We can throw the body into a well ; and there is one not far off I think ; I bathed there this morning."

"Very well," said I ; "when you see the place give the signal. I will settle all our accounts with him for his trouble and carriage of our money."

We came to the well, and the signal was given ; I was ready and my victim also, but he struggled hard, as the bag of rupees was on his shoulders, and my roomal had not fair play. He died however, and we threw him into the well, with a large stone tied in his clothes to sink him.

Strange, Sahib, that after protesting his poverty as he had done, we should have found forty-three rupees in his girdle !

You may judge of my father's joy at my success ; and to prove his sense of the value of my address and ready wit, he presented me with

five hundred rupees out of the sum I had brought.

With this at my disposal, I determined to make a last attempt for Zora, for I thought that with it I might bribe the old woman who called herself her mother; and late as it was, I pleaded some excuse and set off for the city. I soon reached the now well-known street, and finding the door open I entered, and was ushered into the presence of the old woman and Zora's sister Zenat.

They rose on seeing me, and welcomed me kindly.

"You have not been with us, Meer Sahib, since the Mohorum," said the old woman as she cracked all her fingers against her temples. "You knew that you would always be our most favoured guest, and yet we have not seen you. Why has there been this estrangement from us?"

I did not like to accuse the old woman of turning me from the door, as I have related before, so I said I had been absent from the city, and having only just returned had come to pay my respects to her.

"And now, mother," said I, "where is Zora?"

Why is the rose separated from the nightingale?"

"Zora!" said the old woman; "why, have you not yet forgotten that foolish girl? Is there not Zenatbee, who is dying for you, and has raved about you ever since she saw you?"

"Toba! Toba!" cried Zenat, covering her face affectedly. "For shame, mother! how can you speak so? how can you tell such lies?"

"I say the truth, Meer Sahib; I swear the foolish girl's head has been turned by your beauty;" and she stroked my chin caressingly.

What could I do? I saw at once that if I did not affect love for Zenat I should never hear aught of Zora; but I could not forget her so easily, and I hated Zenat for her love. I thought it better to come to terms at once if I could.

"Mother," said I, "I am proud of your daughter's love, and to one so young as I am such marks of preference as you say she is inclined to show me are most flattering; nevertheless I cannot forget Zora: and tell me, by your soul, am I to see her or not? Now hear me; I am not a rich man, not one who could lavish

thousands upon her, but what I have is hers for ever, and yours too, if you will give her to me. Will you part with her?"

"What do you offer?" said the old woman. "Methinks you must be one of our nobles in disguise to come here with such a proposition."

"I am no noble," said I, "but a poor Syud. I have five hundred rupees, and they are yours if you make Zora mine for ever; say the word, and tomorrow I will be present; we will send for a Moola, and the nika shall be performed."

"Five hundred rupees!" cried the old woman, and she and her daughter burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. "Five hundred rupees!" continued she at length, when she could speak; "oh, man, thou art either mad or drunk!"

"I am neither the one nor the other," I replied very angrily; "I am as sober as either of you, nay far more so."

"Then if you are so," said the old wretch, "what, in the name of Alla, has come to you, that you think we would part with Zora for five hundred rupees? Five thousand, and twice as much would not be sufficient."

"Then," said I, "you are a pair of the devil's children, and I spit at you. Not content

with spurning me from your house like a dog, you now deny me the only happiness I looked to on earth. Women, have you no hearts?"

"Yes," cried the old hag in a fury; "yes, we did spurn you, as I do now. Begone! and never dare to intrude as you have done this night, or I will see if I cannot bring a few stout fellows together to beat you out with sticks like a dog and a son of a dog as you are."

"Peace! woman," cried I; "beware how you revile my father."

"May his mouth be filled with earth and his grave defiled! May your mother"—

I could bear this no longer. I ran to the door for my shoes, and held one in my hand threateningly.

"Now," said I, "another word of abuse, and I will beat you on the mouth."

It did not check her. A fresh torrent poured from her lips, and I was really provoked. I could bear it no longer. I rushed at her, beat her on the face with my shoe, and spit on her. The daughter hurried to the stair-head and raised cries of alarm.

"Thief, thief! He is murdering us! Kasim, Mahomed Ali, where are ye? We are mur-

dered—we are defamed! Bring your swords, and kill him!”

I had pretty well belaboured the old woman, and thought it high time to be off; so I rushed to the door, and seizing Zenat threw her to the other side of the room with all my force. I saw that she had a heavy fall, and I ran down the stairs: about half way I met a man with a drawn sword; he stood, and was about to make a cut at me, but I seized his arm and hurled him down the steps, and as he rolled to the bottom I leaped over him and was outside the house in a moment.

Well, thought I, as I went along, I have not got Zora, but I have slippered the old shitan her mother, which is some satisfaction, and Bhudrinath will laugh rarely when he hears of my exploit.

CHAPTER VI.

"CIL.—Madam, your song is passing passionate.

ALV.—And wilt thou not then pity my estate?"

OLD PLAY.

"FOR the love of Alla! young man," cried a low and sweet voice as I passed under the gateway of a respectable-looking house; "for the love of Alla, enter, and save my mistress!"

Fresh adventures, thought I as I looked at the speaker, a young girl, dressed like a slave.

"Who are you?"

"It matters not," said the speaker; "did you not pass this way yesterday afternoon, in company with two others?"

"I did, and what of that?"

"Everything; my mistress, who is more beautiful than the moon at its full, saw you and has gone mad about you."

“I am sorry,” said I, “but I do not see how I can help her.”

“But you must,” said the girl; “you must, or she will die; follow me, and I will lead you to her.”

I hesitated, for I had heard strange stories of lures spread for unwary persons—how they were enticed into houses for the gratification of wicked women, and then murdered. But the thought was only momentary. “Courage! Ameer Ali,” said I to myself; “trust to your good Nusseeb, and follow it up. Inshalla! there will be some fun.”

“Look you,” said I to the girl, “you see I am well armed; I will follow you, but if violence is shown, those who oppose me will feel the edge of a sharp sword.”

“I swear by your head,” said the girl, “there is no danger. My lord is gone into the country, and has taken all the men with him; there is no one in the house beside myself but two slaves and three old women.”

“Then lead on,” said I; “I follow you.”

She entered the gateway and conducted me through a court into an open room, where sat a girl, richly dressed and of great beauty; but she covered herself immediately with her doo-

putta, and cried when she saw me, "Ya Alla ! it is he ; am I so fortunate ?"

"Yes, lady," said I, "your slave is at your feet, and prays you to remove that veil which hides a hoori of paradise from the gaze of a true believer."

"Go," said she faintly ; "now that you are here I dare not look on you ; go, in the name of Alla ! what will you not have thought of me ?"

"That your slave is the most favoured of his race," said I ; "I beseech you to look on me, and then bid me depart if you will."

"I cannot," said the fair girl, "I cannot, I dare not ; ah, nurse, what have you made me do ?"

The old woman made me a sign to take the veil from her face, and I did so gently ; she faintly opposed me, but it was in vain ; in an instant I had removed it, and a pair of the loveliest eyes I had ever seen fixed their trembling gaze upon me—another, and I had clasped her to my heart.

"That is right," said the old woman ; "I like to see some spirit in a lover ; Mashalla ! he is a noble youth ;" and she came and cracked her fingers over my head.

"Now I will leave you," said she; "you have a great deal to say to each other, and the night is wearing fast."

"No, no, no!" cried the girl; "do not leave us; stay, good nurse, I dare not trust myself with him alone."

"Nonsense," cried the old woman, "this is foolishness; do not mind her, noble sir;" and she left the room.

"Lady," said I, "fear not, your slave may be trusted;" and I removed from her, and sat down at the edge of the carpet.

"I know not what you will think of me, Sahib," she said, "and I am at a loss how to confess that I was enamoured of you as I saw you pass my house yesterday; but so it was; my liver turned to water as I looked on your beauty, and I pined for you till my attendants thought I should have died. They said they would watch for you, and Alla has heard my prayer and sent you."

"He has sent a devoted slave," said I; "one whose soul burns with love, such as that of the bulbul to the rose: speak, and I will do your bidding."

"Hear my history, and you will know then how I am to be pitied," said the fair girl; "and

it is told in a few words. I was the daughter of humble parents, but I was as you see me—they say I am beautiful; they married me to my husband,—so they said,—but they sold me. Sahib, he is old, he is a tyrant, he has beaten me with his shoe, and I have sworn on his Koran that I will no longer remain under his roof. Yes, I have sworn it: I would have fled yesterday, but I saw you, and I prayed Alla to send you, and he has done so. Now think of me what you please, but save me!” And she arose, and throwing herself at my feet clasped my knees. “You will not refuse me protection? if you do, and your heart is hard towards me, one thing alone remains—I have prepared a bitter draught, and tomorrow’s sun will look upon my dead body.”

“Alla forbid! lady,” said I. “He who has sent me to you has sent you a willing and a fearless slave: fly with me this instant, and I will lead you to a father who will welcome you, and a land far away where our flight will never be discovered.”

“Now—so soon?” she exclaimed.

“Ay, lady, now; leave your house this moment; I will protect you with my life.”

“I dare not, Sahib, I dare not; ah, what

would become of us if we were discovered ? you would escape, but I—you know a woman's fate if she is detected in intrigue."

"Then what can be done?" said I. "Alas ! I am a stranger in the city, and know not what to advise."

"I will call my nurse ; let us leave all to her. —Kulloo !"

The old woman entered. "What are your commands?" said she.

"Listen," said I ; "I love your fair charge with an intensity of passion ; this is no place for us to give ourselves up to love, for there is danger, and we must fly : I am a stranger in the city, and am on the eve of departure for my home, which is in Hindostan, and whither I will convey her safely ; she is willing to accompany me, and your aid and advice are all that is required."

"To fly ! to leave home and every one for Hindostan, and with one unknown ! Azimabee, this is madness ; how know you who he is, and where he will take you ? I will not assist you. I was willing that you should have a lover, and helped you to get one ; but this is mere madness—we shall be ruined."

"Mother," said I, "I am no deceiver ; I

swear by your head and eyes I can be faithful; do but help two poor creatures whose affections are fixed upon each other, and we will invoke the blessings of the Prophet on your head to the latest day of our lives. I leave here tomorrow; my father is a merchant and accompanies me; he has ample wealth for us both, and I am his only child: we shall soon be beyond any chance of pursuit, and in our happiness will for ever bless you as the author of it. Ah, nurse, cannot you contrive something? is there no spot on the road past Golconda which you could fix on for our meeting? I can reward you richly, and now promise you one hundred rupees, if you will do my bidding."

Azima gathered courage at my words, and fell at the feet of the old woman.

"Kulloo!" she cried, "have you not known me as a child? have I not loved you from infancy? Alas! I have neither mother nor father now; and has *he* not beaten me with a shoe? have I not sworn to quit this house? and did you not swear on my head you would aid me?"

"What can I do? what can I do?" cried the nurse; "alas, I am helpless; what can an old woman like me do?"

"Anything, everything," I exclaimed; "woman's wit never yet failed at a pinch."

"Did you not say you had made a vow to visit the Durgah of Hoosain Shah Wullee?" cried Azima; "and did not you say you would take me to present a nuzzur at the shrine of the holy saint, if I recovered from my last illness?"

"Thou hast hit it, my rose," said the nurse; "I had forgotten my vow. Sahib, can you meet us at the Durgah tomorrow at noon?"

"Assuredly," said I, "I will be present. Good nurse, do not fail us, and another fifty shall be added to the hundred I have already promised."

"May your condescension and generosity increase!" cried she. "Sahib, I have loved this fair girl from her infancy, and though it will go sorely against my heart, I will give her into your hands rather than she should be further exposed to the indignities she has already undergone."

"Thanks, thanks, good nurse, I believe you; but swear on her head that you will not break your faith."

"I swear," said the old woman, placing her hands on Azima's head, "I swear she shall be thine."

"Enough," I cried, "I am content; now, one embrace and I leave you. I shall be missed by my father, and he will fear I am murdered in this wild city."

We took a long, passionate embrace, and I tore myself from her.

"Tomorrow," I cried, "and at the Durgah we will meet, never again to part. So cheer thee, my beloved, and rouse all your energies for what is before you. Tomorrow will be an eventful day to us both, and I pray the good Alla a prosperous one."

"It will, it will," cried the nurse; "fear not for anything. Nurgiz is faithful, and shall accompany us; the rest are long ago asleep, and know not you are here. But now begone; further delay is dangerous, and Nurgiz will lead you to the street."

She called, and the same slave who had ushered me in led the way to the door.

"By your soul, noble sir, by your father and mother, do not be unfaithful or it will kill her."

"I need not swear, pretty maiden," said I; "your mistress's beauty has melted my heart, and I am hers for ever."

"Then may Alla protect you, stranger! That

is your road, if you go by the one you came yesterday."

I turned down the street and was soon at home. My father was asleep, and I lay down; but, Alla! Alla! how my heart beat and my head throbbed! A thousand times I wished I had carried off the beautiful Azima; a thousand times I cursed my own folly for having left her, when by a word from me she would have forsaken home and every tie and followed me; but it was too late. In the midst of conflicting thoughts and vain regrets I fell asleep: but I had disturbed dreams. I thought her dishonoured lord had surprised us as we tasted draughts of love, and a sword glittered over his head, with which he was about to revenge his disgrace. Again I fancied one of the Moolas of the Durgah to be him, and just as she was about to depart with us, and was stepping into a cart, he rushed to her and seized her, and I vainly endeavoured to drag her from him. I woke in the excitement of the dream, and my father stood over me.

"What, in the name of the Prophet, is the matter with you, Ameer Ali, my son?" cried the old man. "It is the hour of prayer, I came to awake you, and I find you tossing

wildly in your sleep and calling on some one, though I could not distinguish the name; it sounded like a woman's—Azima, I think. What have you been about? Had you any bunij last night?"

Bunij was the cant phrase for our victims, and I shuddered at the ideas it called up.

"No, no," I said, "nothing. Let me go and perform my ablutions; I will join you in the Namaz. It will compose my thoughts, and I will tell you."

Our prayers finished, I related my adventures of the past night. He laughed heartily at my relation of the scene with Zora's mother, and declared I had served her rightly; but when I came to that with Azima, his countenance was changed and troubled; however he heard me to the end without interruption, and I augured favourably from it. I concluded all by throwing myself at his feet and imploring his sanction to our union.

"You have gone too far to retract, Ameer Ali," said he. "If you do not fulfil your promise to Azima she will drink the poison she has prepared; you will be one cause of her death, and it will lie heavy on your conscience; therefore on this account I give you my sanc-

tion. I am now old, a few years must see my end, and all I have long wished for is to marry you respectably and to see your children. I endeavoured to effect a marriage-contract in Hindostan before we left, but I was unable to do so. There is now no occasion for one; you have made your choice and must abide by it; Alla has sent you your bride and you must take her—take her with my blessing; and you say she is beautiful, in which you are fortunate. Money you will want, as you have promised some to her nurse; if she is faithful, give her from me an additional fifty rupees; and you had better take gold with you,—it will be easier carried.”

“Spoken like my beloved and honoured father!” I exclaimed, “and I am now happy. I ask your blessing, and leave you to carry our plans into execution. We shall meet again at Puttuncherroo in the evening.”

“Inshalla! we shall,” he replied. “Be wary and careful. I apprehend no danger, but you had better take some men with you.”

“I will,” said I, as I rose to depart; “I will take some of my own, whom I can trust;” and I left him.

My horse was soon ready and my men pre-

pared; but some conveyance was necessary for Azima, and I ran to a house a short distance off where dwelt a man who had a cart for hire. I had been in previous treaty with him, to be ready in case I should get intelligence of Zora, and had engaged him to go as far as Beeder.

"Come," said I, "Fazil, I am ready and the time is come."

"And the lady?" said the fellow, grinning.

"Ah, she is ready too, only make haste, we have not a moment to lose."

"Give me twenty rupees for my mother, and I will harness the bullocks and put in the cushions and pillows."

"Here they are," said I; "now be quick—by your soul be quick!"

"I will be back instantly," said he; and he disappeared inside his house, but returned almost immediately with the cushions and curtains of his cart.

"There," said he, as he completed his preparations and jumped on the pole, where was his driving-seat, "you see I have not been long. Now whither shall I drive? to the city?"

"No," said I; "to Hussain Shah Wullee's

Durgah. Do you precede, and we will follow you, for I know not the road."

"I know it well," said he; "follow me closely."

"Does it lead through the Begum Bazar or the Karwan?" I asked.

"Through both, or either, just as you please."

"And is there no other way?"

"There is, but it is somewhat longer. We must go by the English Residence and turn up towards the Gosha Mahal; the road will lead us far behind both the Karwan and Begum Bazar."

"That will do," said I; "I wish to avoid both."

"Bismilla! then," cried the driver, "let us proceed;" and twisting the tails of his bullocks, a few gentle hints from his toes about their hind-quarters set them off into a trot, which however they exchanged for a more sober pace before we had got far. I allowed him to proceed to some distance, and then put my small party in motion.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW AMEER ALI BIDES TRYSTE, AND IS NOT DISAPPOINTED.

WE soon passed the suburbs of the city, and held on our way towards the Durgah. I was not without hope that we might fall in with Azima on the road; but in this I was disappointed. As we passed over the brow of an eminence, the tombs of the kings of Golconda broke on our sight, occupying the whole of a rising ground in front. I had never before seen them, indeed I knew not of their existence, and they were the more striking on this account. I was astonished at their size and magnificence, even from that distance; but how much more so when we approached them

nearer ! We had plenty of time before us, and I proposed, if the Durgah should not be much further, to diverge from the road and examine them. I rode up to the driver of the cart, and asked him how far we were from the place of our destination.

“You cannot see the Durgah yet,” said the man, “but it is just behind the tombs, on the border of a large tank ; you cannot miss it ; you will see its white dome and gilt spire above the tamarind trees which surround it.”

“Very good,” said I ; “do you go on thither, and if you are asked any questions, say that you belong to a party which is coming out from the city. We shall go to the tombs, and will join you shortly.”

The driver kept to the road, and we, diverging from it, directed our way to the mausoleums of the departed kings. As we approached them, their immense size, and the beautiful groups which they assumed as our point of view shifted, struck forcibly on the mind, while the desolation around them added to their solemn appearance.

“What a pity,” said Peer Khan, who accompanied me, “that the good people of the city do not make gardens about these proud

buildings ! the spot seems to be utterly neglected, even as a burying-ground."

"They are better as they are," said I ; "the dust of the present miserable generation would hardly mix with that of so noble a one as that which has left such a monument of its glory. Ay," continued I, as we entered the first immense tomb, "these were kings and princes who lie here ; men who won their kingdoms at the sword's point, and kept them,—how different to the present degenerate race, who are indebted for the bread they eat to the generosity of the Feringhees !"

We ascended by a narrow stair to the top of the tomb, and from the terrace out of which the huge dome proudly reared itself the view of the city was superb ; but it was not equal to the one I have before described to you, for we saw none of the white buildings ; the Mecca Mosque and the Char Minar were alone distinguishable over the mass of trees, if I except the innumerable white minarets which rose out from the foliage in every direction. From the other side of the terrace the whole of the large tombs were seen at a glance—each by itself a noble and striking object ; but rendered still more so when grouped with others of smaller size,

whose contrast increased their massiveness. Not a creature was to be seen; the old fort itself, its grey mouldering walls covering the face of a huge pile of rocks, seemed tenantless, and was in unison with the abodes of the illustrious dead who had built it.

The silence and desolation were oppressive, and we scarcely made a remark to each other, as we traversed one by one the interiors of the noble edifices,—some of them dark and gloomy and filled with bats and wild pigeons, whose cooing re-echoed within the lofty domes—and others whose wide arches admitted the light of day, and were more cheerful in appearance.

“Enough,” said I, after we had examined some of the largest; “we do but loiter here while we may even now be expected. Yonder is the Durgah, and we had better go to it and be prepared, she cannot now be long absent.”

I saw as we approached the sacred edifice that our cart was ready; but there was no other, and my mind somewhat misgave me that Azima had been unable to keep her appointment; and I resolved within myself that, should she not arrive before noon, I would return to the city

and seek my bride, for such I now considered her. I could not leave so lovely a creature to the rude treatment she would experience from him to whom she was united—one who was undeserving to possess a jewel such as she was ; but it was still early, and perhaps some hours must elapse before she could reach the Durgah, which was further from the city than I had anticipated.

I entered the holy precincts, and after offering up a gift upon the shrine of the saint, I put up a fervent prayer that the object we had come for should end successfully. This done, I sat down under the shade of the trees, and entered into conversation with one of the many Moolas who attended on the tomb, and who were constantly employed in reading the Koran over the grave of the saint. He asked me who I was : I told him I belonged to the city, and had brought my wife to perform a vow to the saint, on her recovering from a dangerous illness ; “but she is not yet come,” said I ; “I rode on with some of my attendants, and she will follow, and will soon be here.”

Hour after hour passed, and yet Azima did not come. Sahib, I was in a torment of suspense and anxiety : could she have met with

any misfortune? could her lord have returned home unexpectedly? could she have played me false? Ah, not the last! her grief, her misery, were too strong to be feigned, and what object could she have had in dissembling? Noon came, and the music of the Nobut began to play, —still no signs of her. My patience was fairly exhausted, and I went to the place where my horse stood, mounted him, and bidding the men remain where they were, I rode on towards the city. I had scarcely got beyond the small village by which the Durgah was surrounded, when I saw three carts with curtains to them carefully closed approaching. My heart beat quickly with hope, and I determined to return; one of them surely is hers, thought I, and I will await her coming in the Durgah.

“She comes!” cried I to Peer Khan, as he eagerly asked the cause of my quick return, “she comes! Bid Fazil have his cart in readiness, and take it round to the gate which leads towards Puttuncherloo.”

I dismounted and stood at the gate.

The first cart arrived; it was filled with dancing-girls, who had a vow to sing at the shrine, one of them having lost her voice some time before, but had recovered it, as they supposed,

at the intercession of the holy Wullee. They passed me, and I soon heard their voices singing one of their melodies inside the tomb.

The second arrived ; three old women got out, who were the bearers of some trays of sweetmeats for the Moolas, the offering of some lady of rank, who was ill and begged their prayers and intercession with the saint for her recovery.

“Mother,” said I to one of them, “saw you aught of a cart with three females in it, my zennana in fact, on the road from the city?”

“Yes,” said the woman, “they are close behind us ; their vehicle broke down in a rivulet we had to pass, and is coming very slowly, but it will be here directly ; and the ladies are safe, for I spoke to them and offered to bring them on, but the damage had been repaired somehow or other, and they declined my offer.”

“Alhumd-ul-illa !” I cried, “they are safe then ; I have been waiting here since morning, and in anxiety enough about them.”

“No wonder,” said the old lady, “for the khanum seemed to be pale and weakly-looking ; but Mashalla ! she is beautiful, and my lord too is in every way worthy of her.”

"She has been ill," said I carelessly, "and her coming is in consequence of a vow she made."

"May Alla give her a long life and many children! I feel an involuntary interest in a pair whom he hath joined together, in every way so fitted for each other; but I go, noble sir, my companions await my coming."

She also passed on, and in a few moments more the cart I so longed to see turned the corner of some projecting houses, and advanced slowly towards the gate. How my heart throbbed! was it her, my life, my soul, or was I doomed to a third disappointment? It stopped, and I could have fallen down and worshiped the old nurse, who first emerged from the closely-curtained vehicle; I ran towards her, but was stopped by the driver.

"It is a zenana, noble sir," he said, "and courtesy requires you to go out of sight, lest their faces should be seen in descending."

"Peace, fool! the women are my own."

"That alters the case," said the man; "and my lord's displeasure must not fall on his slave for this delay; the axletree cracked in passing a rivulet, which is a circumstance no foresight could have prevented, seeing that it was newly fitted after the Mohorum."

“It matters not,” said I; “but you may now leave us; I will return and pay you your hire: there is an empty cart yonder which I will engage for them to return in.”

The fellow retired to a short distance, and my breath went and came as I put my head into the curtains and saw my beloved sitting unveiled, beautiful beyond description, and her fine features glowing with the excitement of her success.

“Shookur khoda!” she exclaimed, “you are here, my own best and dearest; you have not been unfaithful to your poor slave.” I caught her in my arms, and imprinted numberless kisses on her lips.

“Toba! Toba! for shame!” cried the old nurse; “cannot you refrain for a while? Assist her to dismount, and we will go into the Durgah.”

I did so, and closely enveloped in a boorka, and leaning on the old woman and Nurgiz, Azima followed me into the inclosure.

Our first care was to offer up at the shrine some money and a few sweetmeats which Azima had brought with her; the old Moola to whom I had before spoken received them and laid them on the tomb.

"They are accepted," said he, "and whatever prayers you may offer up, our kind Saint will intercede with the holy Prophet for you, that they be granted."

"Thanks, good Moola," said I; "all I desire is, that the pearl of my eyes may be protected in health, and long spared to me. Truly an anxious time have we had of it with her; but she is now restored to health, and may Alla grant it be continued!"

"It will be," he replied; "Alhumd-ul-illa! our blessed Saint's prayers are wonderfully efficacious, and I could relate to my lord many miracles which have been performed here."

"No doubt," said I; "the fame of Hoosain Shah Wullee is spread far and wide, and we of the city have reason to be thankful that such blessed saints were led in days of old to take up their residence near it; for our present generation is so degraded, that without the aid of his prayers the displeasure of the Supreme One would fall heavily on us."

"My lord's words have a sweet and holy savour," said the Moola, "and show that, though his bearing is that of a soldier, his heart is filled with religion; and blessed is he in whom both are seen united. But I could tell my lord of

many of the Saint's miracles, if he has leisure to hear them; and as he will not return till the afternoon, we can sit down under the trees, and I will relate them."

"Excuse me, good Moola," said I; "time presses, and I have promised the Syudanee's mother that I will return before the cold of evening sets in, and it is now past noon."

"As you will," said he; "yet perhaps these few pages, which I have compiled during my leisure hours, may entertain as well as instruct, if my lord will accept them: of course he can read Persian?"

"Indifferently well," said I; "we soldiers are rarely good scholars; nevertheless I will keep the book, and here is a trifle which may prove acceptable;" and I put an ashruffee into his hand.

The old man's eyes glistened as he saw it, and after a profusion of compliments he left us to ourselves.

"Now there is no time to be lost," said old Kulloo; "we must travel far and fast this day. You have brought a cart with you?"

"I have, it is ready; if there be aught in the one you came in, tell me, and I will have it put into the other."

“Send a man or two with us,” said the nurse ;
“I and Nurgiz will arrange the new vehicle,
and return instantly.”

They too left us, and we were alone. No one remained in the large inclosure, the women were still singing in the tomb, and all the Moollas were sitting round them listening.

“Can you support the fatigue of further travel, Azima ?” said I.

“I am strong and can bear anything, so I am with thee and thou with me,” she replied.
“Dearest, I am now secure ; but oh the suspense I have endured since I last saw you, and until I was fairly out of that vile city !”

“Tell me,” said I, “how did you contrive to elude suspicion ?”

“When you left us,” replied Azima, “I thought my happiness had fled for ever ; I would have given worlds to have called you back, and to have fled with you then. I had seen your noble face, I had heard your vows of love ; Alla had sent me a lover such as my warmest fancy had painted to me, while I was daily suffering torments which the fond and loving only can feel, when their affection is returned by severe and bitter insult ; and I thought I had lost him, that I had only gained a few moments of

bliss, which would appear like one of those dreams that had often cheated my sleeping fancy, to leave me when I awoke to the bitter realities of my sad lot—and I was inconsolable; but my kind old nurse and Nurgiz soothed me. They told me they would die for me, and assured me you would be faithful; so I gathered courage, and Kulloo proposed that we should make immediate preparations for flight. We packed up some clothes and my jewels, and all the money which had been left with us, a few hundred rupees, and before morning we lay down to take a little sleep. At daylight Kulloo told the other slaves and the two old servants that I was going to this Durgah, and sent one of them for a cart; it came about sunrise, and concealing the articles we had packed up in two large bundles of carpets and sheets, which we said we should require to sit on at the Durgah, we put them into the cart, got in ourselves, and the driver made the best of his way hither.”

She had just spoken, when Kulloo came to us.

“All is prepared,” said she; “I have dismissed the other cart, and your new one is now ready;—do not delay.”

There was no occasion for her to hurry us, we were as well inclined to set off as she was, and we rose and followed her.

The cart was ready—my men with it, and Nurgiz already inside. Azima got in, and her old nurse followed.

“You too?” cried I.

“Yes, Meer Sahib; my home is at Beeder, whither I will accompany you; the city is no longer safe for me: my life would be forfeited were I ever to enter it again, and fall in with that prince of devils, Nusrut Ali Khan, whose house is now dishonoured, and whose beard we have spat upon.”

“Drive on,” I exclaimed to Fazil; “go as fast as you can; we must reach Puttuncherroo before night-fall.”

The road from the Durgah, after passing the tank upon which it was situated, led through a wild pass; piles of rocks frowned over us, and the road was at times so narrow that the cart could scarcely proceed.

“A rare place for a little work,” said I to Peer Khan, as we reached a low barrier-wall thrown across the road, and pierced with holes for musketry; “many a wild deed has been done here in times past, I’ll warrant.”

"They tell queer stories of the place," he replied; "and we have used it ourselves in some of our late expeditions from the city. There lie the seven Bunneas you heard of," and he pointed out a remarkable rock not far from the road. "A sad business we had with the grave; it was all rock underneath, and the bodies were hardly covered; but who asks about them in this country? Why, as we accompanied the travellers, we saw lying in this very pass the bodies of two men who had been murdered and dreadfully mangled."

"Well," said I, "we have left our marks behind us at any rate, and all things considered we have been lucky. It matters not if we get no more bunij all the way to Hindostan."

"We have enough to make us comfortable for some years," said he; "nevertheless one's hand gets out of practice, and you are but young at the work; the more you have for a few years to come, the better."

We reached Puttuncherloo late in the evening, and to my inexpressible joy found my father and the whole band safely arrived, and comfortably encamped under a large banian tree, by which was a fakeer's tomb. One of our small tents had been pitched for Azima,

and after seeing her settled for the night I joined my father.

“You are a lucky fellow,” said he, when I had told him of all my success; “I have been in anxious suspense about you, especially when the evening set in and you came not; but now there is no danger, we are once again in the country and the roads are our own. And now tell me, what is your new bride like? is she as handsome as Zora?”

“She is quite as handsome,” said I; “the full moon is not more beautiful; she is tender in her love, and of an affectionate and kind disposition: you must see her tomorrow; she is now fatigued with travel.”

“And you must be fatigued also, my son, and hungry too. I have a rare pilau ready for you.”

It was brought; and after sending a portion to Azima, my fingers were very soon busied with the rest of the contents of the dish; and I enjoyed it, for I had tasted nothing but a few of the sweetmeats Azima had brought with her during the whole day.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ROSALIND.—Now tell me how long you would have her, after you have possessed her.

"ORLANDO.—For ever and a day."

AS YOU LIKE IT, *Act IV, Scene 1.*

ON the fourth morning we reached Beeder. If not so striking in its outward appearance as we approached it as Hyderabad, this city was nevertheless interesting. The summit of a long tableland broke into a gentle descent, and from it Beeder suddenly opened on our view. The walls of the town occupied the crest of a high ridge; and over them one tall minaret, and what appeared another rude unfinished one, of great height, towered proudly. On the right hand the large white domes of some tombs peeped out of a grove of mango trees, with which the hill was clothed from top to bottom; and there was a quiet solemnity about the approach to the now

nearly deserted capital of the Dukhun, the favourite residence of the once proud and powerful Bhamunee kings, which accorded well with our feelings, and formed a powerful contrast to the busy city we had just left. Some of our men who had gone on in advance, had chosen a spot for our encampment near the gate of the city upon the road we were to take in the morning; but separating from my party, I rode through the town, which, though now mean in comparison to what it must have been, was more striking than I had expected to find it.

I joined the encampment on the other side, which now presented its usual bustling appearance: some were already cooking their morning meal by the edge of the well, others were bathing, and all talking and conversing in that joyous manner which showed their minds were free from care and full of happiness, at the prospect of a speedier return to their home than they had anticipated, and well laden with a rich booty.

“My father, this is a city full of true believers,” said I, as I joined him; “Moolas there must be in plenty, and I pray you to send for one, that the nika may be performed, and that I may receive Azima at your hands as my wife.”

“I will not oppose it, my son ; but the old Moola, whoever he may be, will think it strange.”

“He may think what he pleases,” said I ; “but I can no longer live without her ; therefore pray consider the point settled, and send for him at once.”

Accordingly Peer Khan was despatched for the holy person, who duly arrived : he was received with the greatest courtesy by my father, and the object for which he was required was explained to him. He expressed the utmost astonishment ; it was a proceeding he had never heard of, for persons to celebrate a marriage on a journey, and was in every respect improper and indelicate.

When he had exhausted his protestations, my father replied to him.

“Look you, good Moola,” said he, “there is no one who pays more respect to the forms and usages of our holy faith than I do. Am I not a Syud of Hindostan ? Do I not say the Namaz five times a day, fast in the Ramzan, and keep every festival enjoined by the law ? And unwilling as I am to do anything which may be thought a breach of the rules of our faith, yet circumstances which I cannot explain render it

imperative that this ceremony should be performed; and if you refuse, all I can say is, that there is no want of Moolas in Beeder, and if you do not perform it some less scrupulous person must, and earn the reward which I now offer to you;" and my father laid two ashrupees before him.

"That alters the case materially," said the Moola, pocketing the money. "Since the ceremony must be performed, in Alla's name let it take place; it was no doubt fated that it should be so, and you will therefore find no person in Beeder more willing to read the form of the Nika than myself; let me I pray you return for my book,—I will be back instantly;" and he departed.

"There," cried my father, "I thought it would be so. No one can withstand the sight of gold: from the prince on the throne to the meanest peasant, it is the same; its influence is all-powerful. With it a man may purchase his neighbour's conscience, his neighbour's wife, or his daughter; with it a man may bribe the venerable Cazee of Cazees, in any city he pleases, to declare him innocent, had he committed a hundred murders, forged documents, stolen his neighbour's goods, or been guilty of

every villany under the sun ; with it, a good man *may* be better—but that is rare—a bad man increases his own damnation : for it, any one will lie, cheat, rob, murder, and degrade himself to the level of a beast ; young women will dishonour their lords ; old women will be bribed to assist them. A man who has hoards will practise every knavery to increase them, yet is never happy ; those who have no money, hunger and thirst after it, and are also never happy. Give it to a child to play with, and by some mysterious instinct he clutches it to his bosom, and roars if it be taken from him. In short, its influence cannot be opposed ; old and young, rich and poor—all are its slaves. Men's wisdom is nothing ; men's eloquence is nothing ; their character nothing ; their rank nothing : but this vile metal, which has no voice, no intellect, no character, no rank—this rules our destinies on earth as surely and as potently as Alla himself does in heaven.”

“Alla ke Qoodrut !” said I with a sigh ; “your words are true, my father, now that one thinks on them ; and we have had a precious specimen in the sudden change of opinion in the worthy Moola, who asked no further questions when he saw your gold.”

“No!” cried my father, “and if one only had enough, one might rule the world. Who was Sikundur? by all accounts, a petty prince, not half so powerful as he who rules this country; and yet, when he gained favour in the sight of the Jins, and afterwards by his magic got dominion over them, did they not place the treasures heaped up in the bowels of the earth at his disposal? and who could then stop his career? Is not this all written in a book, and is it not as true as the Koran?”

“It were heresy to doubt it,” said I; “but here comes the subject of our conversation, with his book under his arm; I will prepare Azima.”

I went to her. “Dearest,” cried I, seating myself and passing my arm round her waist, “Dearest, the time is come, when, with the blessing of Alla and my father’s sanction, you will be mine for ever, and when the law shall bind us together, for death alone to separate us. A Moola has come; and with your permission, now, even now, the Nika shall be performed; further delay is idle, and I am consumed with the burnings of my love.”

“So soon, Ameer Ali? oh, not till we reach your home. What will your father think of my consenting to this wild union?”

“He sanctions it, beloved ! ’twas he who sent for the Moola ; ’twas he who persuaded him to perform the ceremony ; and they but await my return to the tent to read the words which make you mine for ever.”

“Alas ! I know not,” said the fair girl ; “I am another’s wife—how can this be done ?”

“Forget the hateful marriage,” I cried ; “Azima, these objections will kill me. Am I not your slave ? are we not now on our way to a distant land, where he from whom you have fled will never again hear of you ? Ah, do not continue to talk thus, for it seems like a bitter mockery that you should have fled with me, now to deny yourself to me.”

“No, no, no ! do not say so, Ameer Ali ; you saved me from insult, and from a miserable death to which I had doomed myself. I am your slave, not you mine ; do as you choose with me ; let it be even as you will. I will follow you till death.” And she hid her face in my bosom.

“Then,” cried I, “beloved, the preparations are soon made. Call Kulloo, and let her know all.”

The old woman came, and was overjoyed to hear of my proposal.

“I had feared you would not have bound

yourself by this tie, Meer Sahib," said she, "and my mind sorely troubled me on the subject; but now I am easy, and I will give my precious child to you with joy and confidence: may you be blessed in her, and see your children's children. Would that I could proceed with you! but I am old, and my bones and spirit would not rest easily in a strange land: your generosity and what I have scraped together is enough to make me comfortable for life, and when my hour comes I shall die content."

"Then be quick," said I; "put up a screen, and I will call the Moola; you can all three of you sit behind it while the ceremony is read."

A cloth was stretched from one side of the tent to the other, and fastened to the ground: my father, myself, and the Moola sat on one side, the females on the other.

"All is ready, Moolajee," said I; "begin."

He opened his book and read the usual service in Arabic. I did not understand a word of it, neither indeed did he; but it was sufficient that it had been read—the ceremony was complete, and Azima was mine for ever.

It would have been a pity to have left Beeder without seeing more of the town and fort, of

which I had heard many praises ; and in the evening, therefore, my father, myself and a few others strolled into the town for the purpose of seeing what we could. First we passed the old Madressa, a noble mass of ruins ; the front was covered with beautiful enamel from top to bottom, and the immense minaret which we had seen from a distance in the morning was also covered with the same. The huge round fragments of another lay scattered about in every direction, and I could well picture to myself the noble building it must have been, ere by an unfortunate explosion of gunpowder, when used as a magazine by Aurungzebe, its front was blown out, one minaret destroyed, and the whole rent and torn as if by an earthquake.

Passing onwards we arrived at an open space before the ancient and majestic ruins of the fort. Piles upon piles of old ruined palaces, in many places built upon the walls themselves, and all nodding to their fall, while they impressed us with a stronger idea of the magnificence of their builders than anything we had as yet seen, were a lesson to humble proud man—to teach him that he too must moulder in the dust as their founders had done : they had stood for centuries ; yet now the owl, the bat, and the

wild pigeon were the only tenants of these splendid halls, where once beauty had dwelt and had been the adoration of the brave and glorious.

Where were now the princely state, the pomp of royalty, the gallant warriors who had of old manned these lofty walls and towers, and so oft bidden defiance to hosts of invaders?—all were gone,—all was now lonely and desolate, and the stillness accorded well with the ruinous appearance of the scene before us. Not however that the walls were dilapidated or overthrown; *they* remained as firm and solid as ever; and here and there the muzzle of a cannon pointing from a loophole or rude embrasure showed that they were still capable of defence, though, alas! defenders there were none. We thought the place absolutely deserted, and went on to the gateway. It was massive, and highly ornamented with enamel work, such as we had seen before in the old Madressa and the tombs at Golconda.

While we thus stood admiring the outside, a soldier approached us and asked our business.

“We are strangers, who have put up in the town for the day,” answered my father, “and we could not leave the spot without looking

at the venerable fort of which we have heard so much. May we be permitted to enter?"

"Certainly," he replied; "persons of your respectable appearance are always gladly admitted; if you will follow me, I will show you over the interior, which is worthy your inspection."

We followed him, and passing through two gateways, which were defended by traverses so as to be impenetrable to invaders, we stopped under the third, and our conductor said,

"The rooms above this are well worth seeing, if you will ascend."

"Surely," said I, "we would willingly see everything."

We ascended a narrow stair, which at the top opened into a small but beautiful suite of rooms, profusely adorned with enamel, far surpassing in its brilliancy of colours and minuteness of design any that we had before seen on the outside. Sentences of the Koran in white letters on a brilliant azure ground were all round the cornices, and the ceilings and walls were covered with flowers of every hue and design, their colours and the enamel in which they were worked being as fresh and bright as the day they were first painted.

“These are imperishable,” said I to my father; “would that the buildings which held them could be so too, to remain to generations yet unborn a proof of the magnificence and wealth to which they owed their erection !”

“Ay,” said he, “there requires no better proof than these of the present degeneracy. The monarchs of those times were just and liberal as well as powerful: the wealth their dominions brought them was freely expended in beautifying their cities, and raising edifices by which they might be remembered. Now, with the same dominions, the wealth they bring is either uselessly hoarded or wastefully expended; now, no buildings arise as monuments of a dynasty, no armies rejoice in the presence of a brave and noble sovereign, and, stimulated by his example, win for him renown at the points of their bright swords. All now is mean and sordid, from the poor pensioned descendant of Shah Jhan and Alumgeer to the representative of the once proud Soobahs of the Dukhun.”

“Yes,” said our conductor; “what is the use of now calling oneself a soldier, with scarcely bread to eat? the few of us who are in the fort wander about the ruins of the noble palaces and the deserted walls, and our only

enemies are the panthers and hyænas, who have taken advantage of the yearly increasing jungle and desolation, and bid fair to expel us altogether. But look from the window, sirs; the open ground over which you came is called the Fatteh Mydan, the plain of victory. Here the proud monarchs of Beeder, first the Bhamunee and afterwards the Beereed dynasties, used to sit, while their gallant troops poured forth from the gates, and amused while they gratified their sovereign with feats of arms. And yonder," added he, taking us to another window, "yonder are their tombs where their mortal remains rest, though their spirits are in the blessed paradise of our Prophet."

We looked, and the view was as lovely as it was unexpected. We were on the top of what appeared to be a lofty mountain, so far and so deep did the noble expanse of valley before us descend. The blue distance melted into the blue of the heavens, while nearer and nearer to us the villages and fields became more and more distinct, till, close under us, they seemed as it were drawn out on a map; and among them stood the tombs, a cluster of noble-looking edifices, their white domes glaring in the red light of the declining sun.

“Ay,” cried I, “they must have felt that they were kings, while they gazed admiringly on their gallant soldiers, and looked forth over the lovely country which they ruled.”

“Come,” said my father, breaking in upon my reflections, which were rapidly peopling the open space of the Fattah Mydan with the troops and warriors of past ages, and picturing to me their manly games—their mock fights—the shouts of the contending parties—while from the spot whereon I stood the praises of the king and acclamations of his courtiers were ringing through the arched roofs and re-echoed by the multitudes without—“Come, it is growing late, and we must soon return.”

We again followed our guide, and as we passed over a causeway which was built across the moat, we had a noble view of its great width and depth. The bottom was partially covered by stagnant pools, the remains of the water the monsoon had deposited; for the rainy season was now past. The fosse was very curiously dug, with a view to defence, having been excavated out of the solid rock to a considerable depth; three walls had been left standing, with large intervals between each; and they would certainly oppose a most formidable interruption to an invader.

We entered the fort by a large gloomy archway, within which some soldiers were lounging; and from thence traversing a large court-yard, covered with fragments of ruins and rank brushwood, we emerged into an open space beyond. Here a scene of still greater desolation than even the outside presented opened on our view; ruins of all descriptions—of palaces, stables, offices, baths, magazines for arms and ammunition—strewn the ground; it was a melancholy sight, but the whole was evidently far beyond repair, and fast hastening to destruction.

We left the spot, to see the only remaining real curiosity of the place, an immense cannon, the *sister*, as our guide told us, of one at Beejapoor. It was on a high bastion, from which there was a magnificent view of the plain below us, over which the huge fort now flung its broad deep shadow, while the distant country was fast fading into obscurity under the growing darkness of the evening. The herds of the town, winding up the steep ascent from the plain, alone broke the impressive silence, as their lowings, the tinkling of their numberless bells, and the melancholy yet sweet notes of the shepherd's rude pipe, ascended to our lofty station.

But we could stay no longer; we returned

by the way we had come ; and though I longed to have roamed over the ruined and deserted palaces, and explored their recesses, it was too late ; dismissing our guide therefore with a small present for his civility, we retraced our steps to our encampment.

From Beeder, Sahib, we had no adventures worth relating till we reached Ellichpoor, by which town we directed our route homewards ; however we did not travel by the same road as we had done in coming down ; which would have led us by Mungrool and Oomraotee, and we had good reasons for avoiding both places ; the remembrance of the fate of the sahoukar would necessarily be fresh in the memory of the inhabitants of the latter place, and our appearance was too remarkable to be easily forgotten. So we struck off from Nandair on the Godavery towards Boorhanpoor, and when we reached Akola in the Berar valley, we turned again towards Ellichpoor, and reached it in safety. You must not think, however, that during this long journey we were idle ; on the contrary, we pursued our avocation with the same spirit and success with which we had commenced and continued our fortunate expedition ; and no traveller, however humble, who joined our party,

or was decoyed among us, escaped: and by this means, though our booty was not materially increased, yet we collected sufficient to support us, without taking aught from the general stock, which was to be divided when we reached our home.

At Ellichpoor we encamped under some large tamarind trees, close to the Durgah of Rhyman Shah Doolah. It was a quiet lovely spot. Below the Durgah ran a small river, which had its rise in the neighbouring mountains; and over its stream the hallowed buildings of the saint, embowered in thick trees, seemed to be the abode of peace and repose. Thither Azima and myself, attended by some of our men, went, as soon as we had rested ourselves a little and changed our road-soiled garments, to present our offerings at the shrine, and to offer up our thanksgivings for the continued care and protection of Alla.

This done, I sent her back to our camp, and entered into general conversation with the Moolas, as was my wont, in order to gather information to guide us in our enterprises; and from so large a city as Ellichpoor I had some hope that we should gain a valuable booty.

We conversed upon many topics of every-

day occurrence; at last, one of the Moolas asked me where I had come from, and whither I was going. I said I was a horse-dealer, who had been down to Hyderabad with horses from Hindostan, and was now returning, having disposed of them. "And the men who accompany you, who are they?" asked the Moola.

"My father who is a merchant, is one," said I; "besides him there are the grooms and attendants who accompanied us, and several travellers who have joined us from time to time as we journeyed hither."

"Then you are a kafilā?" said the Moola.

"Exactly so," said I; "and feeling ourselves to be strong, we are determined to try the road to Jubbulpoor by Baitool, which, though unsafe for small bodies, presents no obstacle to our numerous party."

"Certainly not," he replied; "and the road will save you a long distance which you would have had to travel had you gone round by Nagpoor; and since you are bent on trying the jungle road, perhaps you would not have any objection to an increase to your party? and I think I could get you one."

"Certainly not," said I, "if the travellers are respectable."

“Highly so,” said the Moola; “the person of whom I speak is a man of rank, no less than a Nuwab, who is returning to his nephew, who rules over Bhopal.”

“Ah, I have heard of him I think,” said I; “you do not mean the Nuwab Subzee Khan, as he is called?”

“The very person, and a fine old soldier he is. It is a pity he is so addicted to the subzee or bhang, from which however he has gained a name which it is well known has struck terror into his enemies on the battle-field, and has fairly superseded any other he may have had.”

“It is a pity,” I said; “for report speaks well of the noble Khan, and his deeds of arms are known to all who have sojourned in Hindostan: I shall be right glad to accompany him, for ’tis said also that he is a rare companion.”

“You have heard rightly,” said the Moola. “The Nuwab will be here before sunset, as he always comes to converse with us and drink his bhang; if you will step over from your encampment when I send to you, I will introduce you to him.”

“Thanks, worthy Moola,” said I; “you only need to summon me, and I will attend your call with pleasure.”

I left him soon after. Here was the commencement of an adventure which promised fairly to eclipse all our former ones ; the rank of the Nuwab, the number of followers he would necessarily have with him, and the noise there would be made about him when he was missed,—all contributed to render this as pretty an adventure as a Thug seeking plunder and fame could desire.

I did not mention a word of my hopes to any one ; I was determined to have this matter all to myself, both in plan and execution. If I succeeded, my fame and character were established for ever, and I could not fail with so many to back me. A momentary thought flashed across me—that the Nuwab was a man of war, that he would be armed to the teeth ; and who was I that I could oppose him ? but I dismissed it in an instant as unworthy. My confidence in my own prowess, both as a Thug and with every weapon, whether on foot or on horseback, was unbounded ; it had never as yet been checked, and I feared nothing living, I believe, in the form of man.

Yes, Ameer Ali, said I, you and all your tribe have ever feared us Englishmen. You

have never yet attacked one of us, nor dared you.

The Thug laughed.—No, Sahib, you are wrong; we never feared you, but to attack any of you would have been impossible. When you travel on horseback you are not worth attacking, for you never carry anything about your persons. In your tents you are surrounded by a host of servants, and at night you are always guarded. When you travel post, we might possibly get a few rupees from your palankeens, but you are generally armed, you usually carry pistols, and some of us must undoubtedly fall before we could effect our object; but above all, there would be such a hue and cry if any of you were missing, that it would be impossible to escape, especially as any property we might take from you would assuredly lead to our detection.

Your reasons are weighty, said I laughing; but I suspect, Ameer Ali, you do not like the pistols, and that is the reason we have escaped you: but go on with your story; I have interrupted you.

Well then, Sahib, to continue. I waited very impatiently till towards evening, when as I

was sitting at the door of my tent, I saw a man on horseback, attended by a small retinue, among whom to my great astonishment was a young good-looking girl mounted on a spirited pony, coming down the road from the city. He passed near our camp, and crossing the river, ascended the opposite bank and entered the Durgah. Was this my new victim? I was not long in suspense; a message soon came from the Moola, requesting my company; and taking my sword and shield with me, I followed the man who had come to call me.

CHAPTER XI.

“He was a stalwart knight and keen,
And had in many a battle been;
His eyebrow dark and eye of fire,
Show’d spirit proud and prompt to ire.”

MARMION.

SEATED with the old Moola I have before mentioned, the Nuwab Subjee Khan Buhadoor (for by that name alone I knew him,) was quaffing his bitter and intoxicating draught. Around him stood some of his retainers, fierce-looking fellows, one or two of them with deep scars on their rough visages, which showed they had bravely followed their noble master through many a hard-fought field. Behind him sat the slave I have mentioned, a slender fair girl, who was busily prepared in making a fresh bowl of the infusion the Nuwab was so fond of.

The Moola introduced me. “This,” said he, “my lord, is the young man I spoke of. I

need repeat no praises of him, for no doubt your discerning eyes will at once observe that he is a person of respectability and good breeding, and a fit companion for one of my lord's exalted rank."

I presented the hilt of my sword as a nuzzur, and after touching it with his hand, he bid me be seated near him on the carpet.

This I was too polite to do ; so excusing myself on the ground of unworthiness of such honour, I seated myself on my heels on the edge of the carpet, and placed my sword and shield before me.

The sword immediately attracted his attention. "That is a noble weapon, Meer Sahib," said he ; " may I be allowed to look at it ?"

" Certainly," said I, presenting the hilt, " the sword is at my lord's service."

" Nay, Meer Sahib, I want it not ; but I am curious in these matters, and have a choice collection, which I will one day show you."

He drew it carefully from the scabbard, and as the brightly polished blade gleamed in the sunlight, he looked on it with a smile of delight, such as one would greet an intimate friend with after a long absence.

I must however describe him. In person he

was tall and strongly made ; his arms in particular, which were distinctly seen through his thin muslin dress, were remarkably muscular, and very long ; his figure was slightly inclined to corpulency, perhaps the effect of age, which had also sprinkled his curling beard and mustachios with gray hairs ; or it might be that these had been increased in number by the dangerous use of the drug he drank in such quantities. His face was strikingly handsome, and at once bespoke his high birth. A noble forehead, which was but little concealed by his turban, was covered with veins which rose above its surface, as though the proud blood which flowed in them almost scorned confinement. His eyes were large and piercing like an eagle's, and, but that they were swollen and reddened by habitual intemperance, would have been pronounced beautiful. He had a prominent thin nose, large nostrils, almost transparent, and a mouth small and curved like a bow, which, when the features were at rest, wore an habitual expression of scorn. His flowing and graceful beard and mustachios, which I have already mentioned, completed a countenance such as I had never seen the like of before, and have not met with since. The whole was in-

expressibly striking, and in the meanest apparel the Nuwab would at once have been pronounced by any one to be a man of high family and a gallant soldier.

A rosary of large pearls was about his neck, and with this exception he wore no ornaments. His dress was studiously plain, while it was neat in the extreme. I remarked two deep scars, one on the back of his head where it joined the neck, the other on his broad chest, and its deep seam was not concealed by the thin dress he wore. Such was Subzee Khan, who had won his renown in many a hard fight, and whom I was determined to destroy on the very first opportunity.

He continued looking at the blade so earnestly and so long, that I began to think that it had possibly belonged to some victim of my fathers, who might have been known to the Nuwab, and I was mentally framing a reply in case he should ask me where I got it, when he suddenly said, as he passed his finger along the edge, "So, you too have seen battles, my friend ; there are some slight dents in this good sword which have not escaped the touch of an old soldier. How did it come by them ?"

"Oh, a trifling skirmish with robbers as I

came down from Hindostan," said I; and I related to him our affair with the thieves in the Nirmul road.

"It was well done," said he, when I ended my account; "but methinks you might have followed up your success and sliced some more of the rogues a little. This weapon would not have failed you if your heart had not."

"My heart never failed me yet, Nuwab," I replied; "those who know me well, also know that I burn for an opportunity to prove that I am a man and no coward; but what could I do in that instance? there were but few of us, and the jungle was terribly thick—we could not have followed them in the dark."

"You are right," he replied; "and what say you, my young friend, to following the fortunes of Subzee Khan? He has at present naught to give thee; but, Inshalla! the time is fast approaching when men of tried valour may win something. My friend Dost Mahomed writes to me to come quickly, for he has need of leaders in his new enterprises; and methinks your figure and address would find favour with him. What say you? You are not fit to sell horses all the days of your life; and if you have turned any money in your present expedition, you can-

not expend it in a manner more befitting your appearance than in getting a few men together, and offering your service. Dost Mahomed has need of such youths as you, and, Inshalla ! we will yet do something to win us fame."

"May your favour increase, Bundé Nuwaz !" cried I ; "it is the very thing my soul longs for ; with your introduction I cannot fail of obtaining service : and if once we have anything to do, you will find I shall not be backward."

"Then you will accompany me ?" said he ; "I am glad of it. You have some men with you I perceive, and some travellers ; what say you to taking the direct road to Jubbulpoor ? it is a rough one, but I am pressed for time ; and that by Nagpoor, though free from interruption or danger of robbers, is much longer."

"I had determined on taking it, Nuwab Sahib," I replied, "even before I saw you, for we are a strong party and well armed ; but now I can have no hesitation. As for thieves or robbers, I have no dread of them, and my lord assuredly can have none ?"

"None, since you have joined me," he said ; "but with the few fellows I have, I confess I hardly liked to brave the jungle ; for the bands

who roam through it are strong and merciless, and it would be a sorry fate for Subzee Khan to fall in an unknown spot, after a life spent in battle-fields."

And yet you will do so, Nuwab Sahib, said I internally; your death-blow will reach you in that jungle you dread, and no monument will mark the spot where the remains of Subzee Khan will lie.

"And when shall you be ready to move, Meer Sahib?" continued he; "have you aught to delay you here?"

"Nothing," I replied. "I had purposed marching tomorrow morning, but if my lord wishes I can wait a few days."

"Ah no,—tomorrow morning I cannot move conveniently, but the day after I will join you here by daylight, and we will travel together."

"Jo Hookum!" I replied; "I shall be ready; and now have I permission to depart?"

"Certainly," he said; "I will no longer detain you, for I must be off myself. My friend Sulabut Khan has an entertainment of some kind tonight, and I have promised to attend it."

I returned to my tent, and though I longed

to break the matter to my father, yet I refrained from doing so until the Nuwab had fairly joined us, when I would introduce him properly.

As we were preparing to start the third morning before daylight, the Nuwab rode into our camp and inquired for me.

I was speedily with him, and my father coming up to us, I introduced them to each other. After the usual compliments had passed, my father, unobserved by the Nuwab, threw me a significant glance,—I returned it, and he understood me; a look of triumph passed across his features, which gratified me, because to me alone was the band indebted for the adventure which was to follow.

Our party was soon in motion, and as the light increased with the dawning day, it revealed to me the person and dress of the Nuwab, who now rode by my side. He was mounted on a splendid bay horse, which moved proudly and spiritedly beneath his noble master: the trappings of the animal were of crimson velvet, somewhat soiled, but still exceedingly handsome, for the saddlecloth and headstall were embroidered with gold thread in a rich pattern.

But the rider chiefly attracted my observation : he wore a shirt of mail, composed of the finest steel links, exquisitely polished, over his ordinary clothes; at his waist it was confined by a handsome green shawl, which he had tied round him, and in which were stuck two or three daggers, mounted in gold and silver. His arms were cased in steel gauntlets, as far as the elbows, and greaves of steel protected his thighs. On his head was a bright steel cap, from the top of which a crimson silk tassel depended, and a shawl handkerchief was folded round it to protect his head from the heat of the sun. At his back hung a shield of rhinoceros hide, richly painted and gilt; a long sword hung at his side from an embroidered velvet belt which passed over his shoulder; and at his saddle-bow was fastened a small battle-axe, with a long and brightly polished steel handle.

Well did his appearance accord with his fame as a warrior. I had seen hundreds of soldiers at Hyderabad, but I had never yet looked on one so perfectly equipped as he who now rode beside me—nor one, could I but have attached myself to him, in whom I should have placed such confidence and followed readily into the

deadliest strife. But what was the use of his weapons or his armour? they would not avail him,—his hours were numbered, and his breath already in his nostrils.

“You observe me intently,” said he.

“I do,” I replied; “for I have never yet seen so perfect a cavalier: horse, arms, and accoutrements all agree in setting off their noble owner. Do you always travel thus?”

“Always, Meer Sahib; a soldier should never be out of his harness. The short time I have spent in idleness with that luxurious dog Sulabut Khan has softened my body, and even now I feel my armour chafe me. But the time comes when I shall need it, and I had as well accustom myself to it.”

We continued the whole of the march together, and he beguiled the way with relations of his adventures, battles and escapes. I was as much fascinated by them as by his powers of conversation, which were remarkable; and I often wished that I had met him as a friend, or enrolled myself under him, when I might have followed his banner and endeavoured to equal his deeds of valour. But he was marked: in our emphatic language he was become a “bunij,”

and he was doomed to die by every rule and sacred obligation of our profession.

We reached our first stage without any adventure. Beyond it the villagers told us that the jungle grew thicker and thicker, that the road was very bad and stony, and above all, that the Gonds were in arms, and plundered all whom they met with.

“Let them try us,” said the Nuwab, as he listened to the relations, “let them try us! In-shalla! they will do us no harm, and it may be some of them will get broken crowns for their pains.”

But the next morning we moved with more caution; our men were desired to keep well together, and I picked out a trusty few to surround the cart, which moved on with difficulty over the rough and stony roads; the Nuwab and myself rode at the head of the party.

As we advanced, the road grew wilder and wilder; in many places it was narrowed almost to a foot-path, and the men were obliged to cut away the branches, which often nearly met across the road, so as to allow the cart to proceed. At other times it ran between high banks, which almost overhung us, and from

which missiles might have been showered on our heads, without a possibility of our being able to strike a blow in self-defence.

“That was an ugly place, Nuwab Sahib,” said I, as we emerged from one of these narrow passes into a more open country, though still covered with jungle; “had we been attacked there we should assuredly have fallen victims.”

“It was indeed,” said he; “and I am thankful we have got out of it; if I remember aright it has a bad name. From hence however I think there are no more; the jungle becomes a forest, and there is not so much underwood. But look,” cried he, “what is that? By Alla! the Gonds are upon us. Shumshere Alum!” cried he, in a voice which rang like the sound of a trumpet, “Shumshere bu dust!” and his glittering blade flashed from the scabbard. Checking his horse, and at the same time touching its flanks with his heels, the animal made two or three bounds, after which the Nuwab fixed himself firmly in his seat, pressed down his cap upon his head, and cried to me to be ready.

I was not behindhand; my sword was drawn and my shield disengaged, which I placed before me to guard me from the arrows. A

few bounds of my horse, which was scarcely second to the Nuwab's, brought me to his side, and we were followed by Bhudrinath and a few others mounted on ponies, and some men on foot with their matchlocks.

"Come on, ye sons of defiled mothers," cried the Nuwab; "come on and prove yourselves true men; come on and try your cowardly arrows against stout hearts and ready weapons! Base-born kafirs are ye, and cowards; Inshalla! your sisters are vile, and asses have loved your mothers."

I could not help laughing at the Nuwab's gesticulations and abuse, as he poured it upon the Gonds and shook his sword at them. They would not move, and perched up as they were on the side of a hill, they prepared their bows to give us a volley—and down it came certainly; the arrows whistled past us, and one wounded the Nuwab's horse slightly in the neck, at which the Gonds set up a shout of triumph.

"Ah, my poor Motee, thou art wounded," cried he, drawing the arrow from the wound. "Meer Sahib, those rogues will never come down; you had better give them a volley and disperse them."

"Now, my sons," cried I to my followers,

“whenever a fellow raises his body to fire, do you mark him.”

They did so. One Gond in particular, who was sitting on a rock drawing a large bow, which he placed against his feet, was a conspicuous object, and apparently careless of his safety. Surfuraz Khan aimed at him—fired—and in an instant he rolled over and over almost to our feet: the ball had hit him in the throat, and he was quite dead. The rest seeing his fate set up loud yells, and for a moment we thought they would have charged us: however another of their number fell badly wounded, and carrying him off they rapidly retreated to their mountain fastnesses. Pursuit would have been vain as it was impracticable.

We met with no further adventure during our march, and duly arrived at our stage by the usual hour.

“Ameer Ali,” said my father, coming to me shortly afterwards, “is the Nuwab to be ours or not? If you have invited him as a guest, say so; if not, you had better arrange something.”

“A guest!” cried I; “oh, no, he must be disposed of; there can be no difficulty where there are so many good places to destroy him.”

“Impossible!” said my father; “on horse-

back it would be madness. He is a beautiful rider, and his horse is too spirited ; the least confusion would make him bound, and who could hold him ? We must devise some other plan."

"Leave all to me," said I ; "if there is no absolute necessity for selecting a place, I will watch my opportunity."

CHAPTER X.

“LEAR.—No, no, no life ;
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
 And thou no breath at all ? O thou wilt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never !”

KING LEAR, *Act V, Scene 3.*

“I SUPPOSE you have long ere this guessed, my friends,” said I to Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan next day, “why the Nuwab is in our company ?”

“We can have little doubt,” replied the former, “since you have brought him so far : but tell us, what are your wishes,—how is it to be managed ? It will be impossible to attack him on the road ; he would cut down some of us to a certainty, and I for one have no ambition to be made an end of just at present.”

“You are right,” said I ; “we must not risk

anything; still I think an opportunity will not long be wanting."

"How?" cried both at the same moment.

"Listen," said I, "and tell me whether my plan meets with your approval. During the march yesterday the Nuwab was regretting that we did not fall in with a good stream of clear water, that he might take his usual sherbet: you know that the slave girl he has with him always prepares it. Now I am in hopes that we may meet one in tomorrow's march, and I will try all I can to persuade him to alight and refresh himself: while he is engaged in conversation with me, if we find him off his guard, we can fall on him."

"Nothing is easier," replied Surfuraz Khan; "we cannot fail if he once sits down; his weapons will not then serve him."

"I do not half like the job," said Bhudrinath. "Suppose he were to be on his guard, he would assuredly escape; and though both myself and the Khan here fear neither man nor devil, yet it is something out of the way to kill a Nuwab; he is not a regular bunij, and I think ought to be allowed to pass free of harm."

"Nonsense!" cried I. "This from you, Bhu-

drinath? I am astonished. What, if he be a Nuwab, is he not a man? and have I not fairly enticed him according to every rule of our vocation? It may be something new to kill a Nuwab, but think, man, think on the glory of being able to say we had killed Subzee Khan, that valiant among the valiant: why, our fathers and grandfathers never did such an act before."

"That is the very reason why I raise my voice against it," said he; "anything unusual is improper, and is often offensive to Bhowanee."

"Then take the omens upon it," said I, "and see what she says. Inshalla! we shall have the Nuwab yet."

"Ay," replied he, "now you speak like a Thug, and a proper one: I will take the omens this evening and report the result; should they be favourable, you will find Bhudrinath the last man to desert you."

In the evening the omens were duly taken, and proved to be favourable. Bhudrinath came to tell me the news with great delight.

"I said how it would be," I cried; "you were owls to doubt our patroness after the luck she has given us hitherto; and now listen, I have not been idle. I have found out from the villagers that about four coss hence there is

a small stream with plenty of water ; the banks are covered with jungle, as thick as we could desire, and I have fixed on that as the place. Shall we send on the Lughaees ?”

“Certainly,” said Bhudrinath ; “we may as well be prepared :—but no,” continued he, “what would be the use of it ? If the jungle is as thick as you say it is, we can easily conceal the bodies ; and at any rate, as there is a river, a grave can soon be made in the sand or gravel. But the Nuwab is a powerful man, Meer Sahib ; you had better not risk yourself alone with him ; as for the rest, the men have secured them,—that is, they have arranged already who are to do their business.”

“So much the better,” said I, “for there is little time now to think about it.”

“I have selected one,” continued Bhudrinath, “the fellow who calls himself the Nuwab’s jemadar ; I have scraped an intimacy with him, and am sure of him ; the others have done the same ; but we left the Nuwab to you.”

“He is mine,” cried I ; “I did not wish to be interfered with. If Surfuraz Khan has not selected any one, I will get him to help me.”

“He has not, Meer Sahib, that I know of, and he is as strong a man as any we have with us ;

with him and another of his men you cannot fail; but let Surfuraz Khan be the Shumshea, he is a good one."

"I scarcely need one if the Nuwab is sitting," said I; "though perhaps it is better to have one in case of any difficulty."

We made all our arrangements that night, and next morning started on our journey in high spirits. The Nuwab and I, as usual, rode together at the head of the party.

"This is an unblest country, Meer Sahib," said he, as we rode along. "Didst thou ever see so dreary a jungle, and not a drop of water to moisten the lips of a true believer from one end of the stage to the other? It is well the weather is cool, or we should be sorely tired in our long stages; and here have I, Subzee Khan, gone without my usual sherbet for three days on this very account. By Alla! I am now as thirsty as a crow in the hot weather, and my mouth opens in spite of me. Oh, that we could light on a river or a well in this parched desert! I would have a glorious draught."

"Patience, Khodawund!" cried I, "who knows but we may be near a stream? and then we will make a halt, and refresh ourselves: I am hungry myself, and should not care for an

hour's delay to break my fast with some dates I have with me."

"Ha, dates! I will have some too; my fellows may find something to eat in my wallets, and thou sayest truly, the cold wind of these mountains makes one hungry indeed."

But coss after coss was left behind, and as yet no river appeared. I was beginning to think I had received false information, and was in no very good humour at my disappointment, when, to my joy, on passing over the brow of a hill, I saw the small river the villagers had spoken of below me.

"There," said I, "Khodawund! there at last is a river, and the sparkling of the water promises it to be good. Will you now halt for an hour? we can have a pipe all round, and your slave can prepare your sherbet."

"Surely," cried he; "we may not meet with another, and this is just the time when I like my sherbet best; send some one to the rear for my slave, and bid her come on quickly."

I despatched a man for her, and reaching the stream, we chose a smooth grassy spot, and spreading the covers of our saddles, sat down.

One by one, as the men arrived, they also rested, or wading into the water refreshed

themselves by washing their hands and faces in the pure stream, which glided sparkling over its pebbly bed; the beasts too were allowed to drink; and all the men sitting down in groups, the rude hooka passed round among them, while they cheerfully discussed the merits of the road they had passed, and what was likely to be before them. Casting a hasty glance around, I saw that all the men were at their posts, three Thugs to each of the Nuwab's servants and retainers. They were therefore sure. Azima's cart was standing in the road, and in order to get her away I went to her.

"Beloved," said I, "we have halted here for a short time to allow of the people taking some refreshment, but you had better proceed; the road appears smooth, and we shall travel the faster to overtake you."

"Certainly," she replied; "bid them drive on, for I long to be at the end of the journey. Poor Nurgiz and myself are well nigh jolted to death."

"Ah, well," I said, "bear up against it for another stage or two. I promise you to get a dooly, if I can, at the first large village or town we come to, and then you will be comfortable."

"Now proceed," said I to the Thug who

acted as driver (for I had purchased a cart on the road, soon after we left Beeder, and he had driven it ever since), "proceed, but do not go too fast."

She left me, and I returned to the Nuwab. He was sitting in conversation with my father, and even now was evidently partially intoxicated with his detestable beverage.

"Ho! Meer Sahib," cried he; "what dost *thou* think? here have I been endeavouring to persuade this worthy father of thine to take some of my sherbet. By Alla! 'tis a drink worthy of paradise, and yet he swears it is bitter and does not agree with his stomach. Wilt thou take a drink?" and he tendered me the cup. "Drink, man! 'twill do thee good, and keep the cold wind out of thee; and as to the preparation, I'll warrant it good; for there breathes not in the ten kingdoms of Hind a slave so skilled in the art of preparing subjee as Kureena yonder. Is it not so, girl?"

"My lord's favour is great toward his slave," said the maiden; "and if he is pleased, 'tis all she cares for."

"Then bring another cup," cried the Nuwab; "for what saith the song?" and he roared out the burden of one I had heard before—

“Peyala pea, to myn né pea, phir kisee ko kya !”*

“and what is it to any one? All the world knows that Subzee Khan drinks bhang, and is not the worse soldier for it. Now with a few fair girls to sing a ghuzul or two to us, me-thinks a heaven might be made out of this wild spot.”

“It is a good thought, Nuwab,” cried I, chiming in with his humour; “we will get a set of Tuwaifs from the next village we come to; I dare say they will accompany us for a march or two.”

“You say well, Meer Sahib; yours are good words, very good words; and, Inshalla! we will have the women,” said the Nuwab slowly and indistinctly, for he had now swallowed a large quantity of the infusion, which had affected his head. “By Alla! they should dance too—like this—” continued he with energy, and he got up, and twirled himself round once or twice with his arms extended, throwing leering glances around upon us all.

It was irresistibly ludicrous to behold him. His splendid armour and dress but ill assorted

* A cup (of wine) is drunk,—then I have drunk it;
What is it to any one?

with the mincing gait and absurd motions he was going through, and we all laughed heartily.

But the farce was proceeding too long, and we had sterner matter in hand than to waste our time and opportunity in such fooleries. So I begged him again to be seated, and motioned to Surfuraz Khan to be ready the instant he should see me go round to his back.

“Ho! Kureena,” cried he, when he had again seated himself, “bring more subzee, my girl: by Alla! this thirst is unquenchable, and thou art excelling thyself today in preparing it. I must have more, or I shall never get to the end of this vile stage. I feel now as if I could sleep, and some more will revive me.”

“Fazil Khan, bring my hooka,” cried I as loud as I could. It was the signal we had agreed on.

“Ay,” cried the Nuwab, “I will beg a whiff or two, ’twill be agreeable with my sherbet.”

I had now moved round behind him; my roomal was in my hand, and I signalled to Surfuraz Khan to seize him.

“Look, Nuwab!” cried he; and he laid hold on his right arm with a firm grasp.

“How dare you touch me, slave?” ejacu-

lated Subzee Khan. "How dare you touch a Nuwab—?"

He did not finish the sentence. I had thrown the cloth about his neck, Surfuraz Khan still held his hand, and my father pulled at his legs with all his force. The Nuwab snored several times like a man in a deep sleep, but my grip was firm and did not relax: a horse would have died under it. Suddenly, as he writhed under me, every muscle in his body quivered; he snored again still louder, and the now yielding form offered no resistance. I gazed upon his features, and saw that the breath of life had passed from the body it had but now animated. Subzee Khan was dead—I had destroyed the slayer of hundreds!

But no one had thought of his poor slave girl, who at some distance, and with her back turned to us, had been busily engaged in preparing another rich draught for her now unconscious master. She had not heard the noise of our scuffle, nor the deep groans which had escaped from some of the Nuwab's people, and she approached the spot where Surfuraz Khan was now employed in stripping the armour and dress from the dead body.

Ya Alla! Sahib, what a piercing shriek

escaped her, when she saw what been done ! I shall never forget it, nor her look of horror and misery as she rushed forward and threw herself on the body. Although master and slave, Sahib, they had loved.

Her lips were glued to those of the unconscious corpse, which had so often returned her warm caresses, and she murmured in her agony all the endearing terms by which she had used in their private hours to call him, and implored him to awake.

“He cannot be dead ! he cannot be dead !” cried the fair girl,—for she was beautiful to look on, Sahib, as she partly rose and brushed back her dishevelled hair from her eyes ; “and yet he moves not—he speaks not”—and she gazed on his features for a moment. “Ah !” she screamed, “look at his eyes—look at them—they will fall out of his head ! and his countenance, ’tis not my own lord’s—those are not the lips which have often spoken kind words to his poor Kureena ! Oh, my heart, what a pain is there !”

“This will never do,” cried I ; “some of you put her out of her misery ; for my part, I war not with women.”

“The girl is fair,” said Surfuraz Khan ; “I will give her a last chance for life.”

“Hark you!” cried he to her, “this is no time for fooling;” and as he rudely shook her by the arm, she looked up in his face with a piteous expression, and pointed to the body by which she was kneeling and mourning as she rocked herself to and fro. “Hear me,” cried the Khan, “those who have done that work will end thy miserable life unless thou hearkenest to reason. I have no wife, no child: thou shalt be both to me, if thou wilt rise and follow me. Why waste further thought on the dead? And thou wast his slave too! Rise, I say again, and thy life is spared—thou shalt be free.”

“Who spoke to me?” said she, in tones scarcely audible. “Ah, do not take me from him; my heart is broken! I am dying, and you would not part us?”

“Listen, fool!” exclaimed the Khan; “before this assembly I promise thee life and a happy home, yet thou hearkenest not: tempt not thy fate; a word from me, and thou diest. Wilt thou then follow me? my horse is ready, we will leave the dead, and think no more on the fate of him who lies there.”

“Think no more on him! forget him—my own, my noble lover! Oh, no, no, no! Is he not dead? and I too am dying.”

“Again I warn thee, miserable girl,” cried Surfuraz Khan; “urge me not to use force; I would that you followed me willingly—as yet I have not laid hands on thee.”

A low moan was her only reply, as she turned again to the dead, and caressed the distorted and now stiffening features.

“Away with the body!” cried I to some of the Lughaees, who were waiting to do their office; “one would think ye were all a parcel of love-sick girls, like that mourning wretch there. Are we to stay loitering here because of her fooling? Away with it!”

My order was obeyed; four of them seized the body, and bore it off in spite of the now frantic exertions of the slave; they were of no avail; she was held by two men, and her struggles to free herself gradually exhausted her.

“Now is your time,” cried I to Surfuraz Khan; “lay hold of her in the name of the thousand Shitans, since you must have her, and put her on your horse: you can hold her on, and it will be your own fault if you cannot keep her quiet.”

Surfuraz Khan raised her in his arms as if she had been a child; and though now restored to consciousness, as she by turns re-

viled us, denounced us as murderers, and implored us to kill her, he bore her off and placed her on his horse. But it was of no use; her screams were terrific, and her struggles to be free almost defied the efforts of Surfuraz Khan on one side and one of his men on the other to hold her on.

We proceeded about half a coss in this manner, when my father, who had hitherto been a silent spectator, rode up, as I was again vainly endeavouring to persuade the slave to be quiet and to bear with her fate.

"This is worse than folly," cried he, "it is madness; and you, above all, Surfuraz Khan, to be enamoured of a smooth-faced girl in such a hurry! What could we do were we to meet travellers? She would denounce us to them, and then a fine piece of business we should have made of it. Shame on you! do you not know your duty better?"

"I'll have no more to say to the devil," said the man on the left of the horse doggedly; "you may even get her on the best way you can; what with her and the horse, a pretty time I am likely to have of it to the end of the journey;" and he quitted his hold.

"Ay," said I, "and think you that tongue

of hers will be silent when we reach our stage? what will you do with her then?"

"Devil!" cried the Khan, striking her violently on the face with his sheathed sword, "will you not sit quiet, and let me lead the horse?"

The violence with which he had struck caused the sword to cut through its wooden scabbard, and it had inflicted a severe wound on her face.

"There," cried my father, "you have spoilt her beauty at any rate by your violence; what do you now want with her?"

"She is quiet at all events," said the Khan, and he led the horse a short distance.

But the blow had only partly stunned her, and she recovered to a fresh consciousness of her situation; the blood trickled down her face, and she wiped it away with her hand; she looked piteously at it for an instant, and the next dashed herself violently to the earth.

"One of you hold the animal," cried the Khan, "till I put her up again." But she struggled more than ever, and rent the air with her screams: he drew his sword and raised it over her.

"Strike!" she cried, "murderer and villain

as you are, strike ! and end the wretched life of the poor slave ; you have already wounded me, and another blow will free me from my misery ; I thought I could have died then, but death will not come to me. Will you not kill me ? ”—and she spat on him.

“ This is not to be borne ; fool that I was to take so much trouble to preserve a worthless life,” cried the Khan, sheathing his sword ; “ thou shalt die, and that quickly.” He threw his roomal about her neck, and she writhed in her death agonies under his fatal grasp.

“ There ! ” cried he, quitting his hold, “ I would it had been otherwise ; but it was her fate, and I have accomplished it ! ” and he left the body and strode on in moody silence.

Some of the Lughaees coming up, the body was hastily interred among the bushes which skirted the road, and nothing now preventing us, we pursued our journey with all the speed we could. Thankful was I that I had sent on Azima in her cart ; she was far beyond the scene of violence which had happened, and of which she must have guessed the cause had she been within hearing ; but the driver of her cart had hurried on, and we had travelled some coss ere we overtook her. Strange,

Sahib, that after that day Surfuraz Khan was no longer the light-hearted, merry being he had used to be. He was no novice at his work ; hundreds of human beings, both male and female, had died under his hand ; but from the hour he killed the slave he was an altered being : he used to sit in silent, moody abstraction, his eyes gazing on vacancy, and when we rallied him upon it, his only reply was a melancholy smile, as he shook his head, and declared that his spirit was gone : his eyes too would on these occasions sometimes fill with tears, and sighs enough to break his heart would escape from him.

He accompanied us to our home, got his share of the booty, which he immediately distributed among the poorer members of the band, and after bidding us a melancholy farewell, stripped himself of all his clothes, covered his body with ashes, and went forth into the rude world, to bear its buffets and scorn, in the guise of a Fakeer.

I heard, years afterwards, that he returned to the spot where he had killed the girl, constructed a hut by the road-side, and ministered to the wants of travellers in that wild region, where his only companions must have been the bear,

the tiger, and the wolf. I never saw him again after he parted from us, and many among us regretted his absence, and his daring skill and bravery, in the expeditions in which we afterwards engaged: his place was never filled among us.

I have no more adventures of this expedition to relate to you: we reached our home in due course without any accident or interruption; and who will not say that we enjoyed its quiet sweets, and appreciated them the more after our long absence and the excitement and perils of our journey? I was completely happy, secure in the increasing love and affection of Azima, whose sweet disposition developed itself more and more every day. I was raised to a high rank among my associates, for what I had achieved was duly related to those who had staid in our village, and to others who had been out on small expeditions about the country; and the immense booty we had acquired, and my father's well-known determination to retire from active life, pointed me out as a leader of great fortune, and one to whom many would be glad to entrust themselves in any subsequent expedition, as I appeared to be an especial favourite of our patroness.

The return of Hoosein's party, about two months after we had arrived, was an event of great rejoicing to us all when they reached our village. As we had agreed beforehand, at our separation, the whole of the proceeds of the expeditions of both parties were put into one, for general distribution, and on a day appointed it took place. Sahib, you will hardly believe it when I tell you that the whole amounted to very nearly a lakh of rupees.

It was carried by general acclamation that I should share as a jemadar, and according to the rules of our band I received one eighth of the whole. Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan received what I did, but the latter only of such portion as we had won since he joined us. I forget how much it was, but, as I have told you, he divided it among the poorer members of the band; and having apparently staid with us only for this purpose, he left us immediately, as I have before mentioned.

Upon the sum I had thus acquired I lived peacefully two years. I longed often to go out on small expeditions about the country, but my father would not hear of it.

"What is the use?" he would say. "You have ample means of subsistence for two years

to come; my wealth you know is also large, and until we find the supply running short, why should you risk life in an attempt to gain more riches, which you do not need?"

But my spirit sorely rebelled against leading such an inactive and inglorious life, and every deed I heard of only made me more impatient to cast off the sloth which I feared would gain hold on me, and to mingle once more in the exciting and daring exploits of my profession.

Still I was fond of my home. Azima had presented me with a lovely boy, who was the pride of my existence, and about the time I am speaking of I expected another addition to my family. I had already seen two seasons for departure pass, and a third was close at hand, but I suffered this also to elapse in inactivity, although I was repeatedly and strongly urged by Bhudrinath and others to try my fortune and head another band to penetrate into Bengal, where we were assured of ample employment and success.

But much as I wished to accompany them, my father still objected; something had impressed him with an idea that the expedition would be unfortunate; and so in truth it turned

out. A large gang under several leaders set out from our village at the usual time ; but the omens, although not absolutely bad, were not very encouraging, and this had a dire effect on the whole. They had not proceeded far when jealousies and quarrels sprung up among the several leaders ; they separated from each other and pursued different ways. One by one they returned disappointed with their expedition, having gained very little booty, scarcely sufficient to support them for the remainder of the year. But one party was never heard of more ; it consisted of my poor friend Bhudrinath and six noble fellows he had taken with him. Years afterwards we heard his fate : he had gone down into Bengal, had visited Calcutta, and up to that period had been most successful ; but there his men dissipated their gains in debauchery, and they set out on their return with barely sufficient to carry them a few marches.

They had nearly reached Benares, when, absolute starvation staring them in the face, they attacked some travellers, and, as they thought, killed them. They neglected, however, to bury their victims, and one, who was not dead, revived : he gave information to the inhabitants

of the nearest village. My poor friends were overtaken, seized, the property they had about them immediately recognised, and the evidence given by the survivor of the party they had attacked was convincing. What could oppose this? The law had its course, and they were tried and hung.

Ameer Ali here stopped in his narrative, and promising to resume it in a few days, he requested permission to withdraw, and making his usual salam departed.

A strange page in the book of human life is this! thought I, as he left the room. That man, the perpetrator of so many hundred murders, thinks on the past with satisfaction and pleasure; nay he takes a pride in recalling the events of his life, almost every one of which is a murder, and glories in describing the minutest particulars of his victims, and the share he had in their destruction, with scarcely a symptom of remorse! Once or twice only has he winced while telling his fearful story, and what agitated him most at the commencement of his tale I have yet to hear.

With almost only that exception, his spirit has seemed to rise with the relation of the past;

and his own native eloquence at times, when warmed with his tale and under the influence of his vivid imagination and faithful memory, has been worthy of a better pen and a more able translator than I am: but let this pass; I repeat, it is a strange and horrible page in the varied record of humanity. Murderers there have been in every country under heaven, from the time of Cain to the present,—murderers from hate, from revenge, from jealousy, from fear, from the instigation of any and every evil passion of our nature; but a murderer's life has ever been depicted as one of constant misery,—the worm that dieth not, the agony and reproach of a guilty conscience, gnawing at the heart, corroding and blasting every enjoyment of life, and either causing its wretched victim to end his existence by suicide, to deliver himself up to justice, or to be worn down by mental suffering—a more dreadful fate perhaps than the others. Such are the descriptions we have heard and read of murderers, but these Thugs are unlike any others. No remorse seems to possess their souls. In the weariness of perpetual imprisonment one would think their imaginations and recollections of the past would be insupportable to

them ; but no,—they eat, drink, and sleep like others, are solicitous about their dress, ever ready to talk over the past, and would, if released tomorrow, again follow their dreadful profession with a fresh zest after their temporary preclusion from it. Strange too that Hindoo and Moslem, of every sect and denomination, should join with one accord in the superstition from which this horrible trade has arisen. In the Hindoo perhaps it is not to be wondered at, as the goddess who protects him is one whom all castes regard with reverence and hold in the utmost dread ; but as for the Moslem, unless his conduct springs from that terrible doctrine of Fatalism, with which every true believer is thoroughly imbued from the first dawn of his reason, it is difficult to assign a reason for the horrible pursuit he has engaged in. His Koran denounces murderers. Blood for blood, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, is the doctrine of his Prophet, which he trembles at while he believes.—And Ameer Ali is a Bhula Admee even in the eyes of his jailers ; a respectable man, a religious man, one who from his youth up has said his Namaz five times a day, is most devout in his life and conduct, is most particular in his ablutions, keeps the fast of the

Ramzan and every saint's day in his calendar, dresses in green clothes in the Mohorum, and beats his breast and tears his hair as a good Syud of Hindostan ought to do ; in short, he performs the thousand and one ceremonies of his religion, and believes himself as sure of heaven and all the houris promised there as he now is of a good dinner.

And yet Ameer Ali is a murderer, one before whom every murderer of the known world, in times past or present,—except perhaps some of his own profession, the free bands of Germany, the Lanknechts, the Banditti, Condottieri, of Italy, the Buccaneers and Pirates, and in our own time the fraternity of Burkes and Hares, (a degenerate system of Thuggee, by the bye, at which Ameer Ali, when I told him of them, laughed heartily, and said they were sad bunglers,)—must be counted men of small account.

Reader, these thoughts were passing in my mind, when at last I cried aloud, “Pshaw! ’tis vain to attempt to account for it, but Thuggee seems to be the offspring of fatalism and superstition, cherished and perfected by the wildest excitement that ever urged human beings to deeds at which humanity shudders.”

“ Did Khodawund call ? ” said a bearer, who had gradually nodded to sleep as he was pulling the punkah above my head, and who was roused by my exclamation. “ Did the Sahib call ? ”

“ No, Boodun, I did not ; but since you are awake, bid some one bring me a chilum. My nerves require to be composed.”

CHAPTER XI.

“ He is a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.”

HAMLET, *Act I. Scene 2.*

AT the expiration of a week, Ameer Ali sent word to me that he was ready to resume his narrative, and I lost no time in requesting him to repair to my residence. He arrived, and making his usual graceful obeisance, I desired him to be seated.

The reader will perhaps like to know something of the appearance of the man with whom he and I have had these long conversations; and no longer to keep him in the dark on so important a subject, I will describe Ameer Ali to him. He is what would be called a short man, about five feet seven inches

in height ; his figure is now slender, which may be the effect of his long imprisonment,—imprisonment it can hardly be called, except that to one of his formerly free and unrestrained habits and pursuits, the smallest restraint must of course be irksome in the highest degree and painful to bear. His age may be about thirty-five or forty years, but it sits lightly on him for a native of India, and it has not in the least whitened a beard and mustachios on which he evidently expends great care and pains, and which are always trimmed and curled with the greatest neatness. His figure, as I have said, is slight, but it is in the highest degree compact, agile, and muscular, and his arms are remarkable for the latter quality combined with unusual length and sinewyness. His dress is always scrupulously neat and clean, and put on with more attention to effect than is usual with his brother approvers, his turban being always tied with a smart cock, and his waist tightly girded with an English shawl or a gaily dyed handkerchief, where once a shawl of Cashmere or a handkerchief of brocade was better suited to his pretensions. In complexion he is fair for a native ; his face is even now strikingly handsome, and leads me to believe that the ac-

counts of his youthful appearance have not been exaggerated. His forehead is high and broad; his eyes large, sparkling, and very expressive, especially when his eloquence kindles and bursts forth in a torrent of figurative language, which it would be impossible to render into English, or, if it were rendered, would appear to the English reader, unused to such forms of speech, highly exaggerated and absurd. His cheeks are somewhat sunken, but his nose is aquiline and elegantly formed, and his mouth small and beautifully chiselled, and his teeth are exquisitely white and even. His upper lip is graced with a pair of small mustachios, which would be the envy of many a gay lieutenant of hussars; while a beard close and wavy, from which a straggling hair is never suffered to escape, descends nearly to his breast, and hides a throat and neck which would be a study for a painter or a sculptor: to complete all, his chest is very broad and prominent, and well contrasts with the effect of his small waist.

His manner is graceful, bland, and polite,—it is indeed more than gentlemanlike—it is courtly, and I have not seen it equalled even by the Mahomedan noblemen, with many of whom I have associated. Any of my readers

who may have been in India, and become acquainted with its nobles and men of rank, will estimate at once how high is the meed of praise on this score which I give to Ameer Ali. His language is pure and fluent, perhaps a little affected from his knowledge of Persian, which, though slight, is sufficient to enable him to introduce words and expressions in that language, often when they are not needed, but still it is pure Oordoo; he prides himself upon it, and holds in supreme contempt those who speak the corrupt patois of the Dukhun, or the still worse one of Hindostan. Altogether Ameer Ali is a character, and a man of immense importance in his own opinion and that of every one else; and the swagger which he has now adopted in his gait, but which is evidently foreign to him, does not sit amiss on his now reduced condition.

Reader, if you can embody these descriptions, you have Ameer Ali before you; and while you gaze on the picture in your imagination and look on the mild and expressive face you may have fancied, you, as I was, would be the last person to think that he was a professed murderer, and one who in the course of his life has committed upwards of seven hundred mur-

ders. I mean by this, that he has been actively and personally engaged in the destruction of that number of human beings.

Now, Ameer Ali, said I, since I have finished describing your appearance, I hope you are ready to contribute more to the stock of adventures you have already related.

Your slave is ready, Sahib, he replied, and Inshalla Ta-alla! he will not disappoint you. But why has my lord described my poor appearance, which is now miserable enough? But might your slave ask what you have written?—and the tone of his voice implied that he had concluded it could not be favourable.

Listen, said I, and I will read it to you. At every sentence the expression of his face brightened. When I had concluded, he said,

It is a faithful picture, such as I behold myself when I look in a glass. You have omitted nothing, even to the most trifling particulars; nay, I may even say, my lord has flattered me.—And he arose and made a profound salam.

No, said I, I have not flattered your external appearance, which is prepossessing; but of your heart I fear those who read will judge for

themselves, and their opinions will not be such as you could wish, but such as you deserve.

You think my heart bad then, Sahib?

Certainly I do.

But it is not so, he continued. Have I not ever been a kind husband and a faithful friend? Did I not love my children and wife while He who is above spared them to me? and do I not even now bitterly mourn their deaths? Where is the man existing who can say a word against Ameer Ali's honour, which ever has been and ever will remain pure and unsullied? Have I ever broken a social tie? ever been unfaithful or unkind to a comrade? ever failed in my duty or in my trust? ever neglected a rite or ceremony of my religion? I tell you, Sahib, the man breathes not who could point his finger at me on any one of these points. And if you think on them, they are those which, if rigidly kept, gain for a man esteem and honour in the world.

But the seven hundred murders, Ameer Ali,—what can you say to them? They make a fearful balance against you in the other scale.

Ah! those are a different matter, said the Thug laughing,—quite a different matter. I

can never persuade you that I was fully authorized to commit them, and only a humble instrument in the hands of Alla. Did I kill one of those persons? No! it was He. Had my roomal been a thousand times thrown about their necks and the strength of an elephant in my arms, could I have done aught; would they have died, without it was His will? I tell you, Sahib, they would not, they could not; but as I shall never be able to persuade you to think otherwise, and as it is not respectful in me to bandy words with my lord, I think it is time for me to recommence my tale, if he is ready to listen, for I have still much to relate. I have been so minute in the particulars of my first expedition, that perhaps I need not make the narrative of the other events of my life so prolix; indeed, were I to do so, you, Sahib, would be tired of writing and your countrymen of reading, for it would be an almost endless task to follow me in every expedition I undertook. I shall therefore, with your permission, confine myself to the narration of those which I think will most interest you, and which I remember to possess remarkable incidents.

Go on, said I; I listen.

Well then, said the Thug, Khodawund must remember that I told him I passed over three expeditions, and that I had partly determined to go on the third. It is of that expedition I would now speak, as it was marked by an extraordinary circumstance, which will show you at once that it is impossible for any one to avoid his fate if it be the will of Alla that he should die.

At the time I speak of I had been obliged to form another set of intimates in consequence of the loss of Bhudrinath and Surfuraz Khan, for both of whom I had the sincerest regard. Hoosein, though I loved and revered him as my father's dearest friend, was now too old and grave to participate in all my thoughts and perhaps wild aspirations for distinction. So as Peer Khan and Motee-ram, with whose names you are familiar, had now risen to my own rank, and proved themselves to be "good men and true" in various expeditions, I took them into my confidence, and we planned an enterprise, of which I was to be the leader and they my subordinates. Fifty of the youngest, stoutest, and most active and enterprising of our acquaintance were fixed on as the band; and all having been previously warned, we met

a few days before the Dussera of the year 18—in a grove near our village, which was shady and well adapted for large assemblies, and was always used as a place of meeting and deliberation; it was considered a lucky spot, no unfortunate expedition ever having set out from it.

We were all assembled. It was a lovely morning, and the grass, as yet not even browned by the sun and drought, was as if a soft and beautiful carpet had been spread on purpose for us. The surrounding fields, many of them tilled by our own hands, waved in green luxuriance, and the wind as it passed over them in gentle gusts caused each stalk of tall jowaree to be agitated, while the sun shining brightly made the whole glitter so that it was almost painful to look on for a continuance. Birds sang in the lofty banian trees which overshadowed us; hundreds of green parroquets sported and screamed in their branches, as they flew from bough to bough, some in apparent sport, others to feed on the now ripening berries of the trees; and the whole grove resounded with the cooing of innumerable turtle-doves, whose gentle and loving murmurs soothed the turbulence of the heart, and bade it be at peace and rest and as happy as they were.

My father and Hoosein were present to guide us by their counsels and experience, and the matter in hand was commenced by a sacrifice and invocation to Bhowanee; but as I have before described these ceremonies, it is needless to repeat them; suffice it to say that the omens were taken and were favourable in the highest degree; they assured us, and though I had little faith in them notwithstanding all I had heard to convince me of their necessity, they inspirited the whole band, and I partook of the general hilarity consequent upon them.

My father opened the object of the meeting in a short address. He said he was old and no longer fitted for the fatigues and privations of a journey; he recapitulated all I had done on the former expedition, pointed out the various instances in which I had displayed activity, daring, and prudence beyond my years, and concluded by imploring the men to place implicit confidence in me, to obey me in all things as though he himself were present, and above all not to give way to any disposition to quarrel among themselves, which would infallibly lead to the same disastrous results as had overtaken the expedition which had gone out the previous year.

They one and all rose after this address, and by mutual consent swore on the sacred pick-axe to obey me, the most impressive oath they could take, and any deviation from which they all firmly believed would draw down the vengeance of our Protectress upon them and lead to their destruction.

I will not occupy your time, Sahib, by a narration of what I myself said ; suffice it to say, I proposed that the band should take the high road to the Dukhun, and penetrate as far as Jubbulpoor or Nagpoor ; from thence we would take a direction eastward or westward, as hope of booty offered, and so return to our home. Khandesh I mentioned, as being but little known to us Thugs, and where I thought it likely we might meet with good booty, as I had heard that the traders of Bombay were in the habit of sending large quantities of treasure to their correspondents in Malwa for the purchase of opium and other products of that district. I concluded by assuring them that I had a strong presentiment of great success, that I felt confidence in myself, and that if they would only follow me faithfully and truly, we might return in a few months as well laden with spoil as we had on the former occasion.

Again they rose and pledged their faith ; and truly it was a solemn sight to see those determined men nerve themselves for an enterprise which might end happily, but which exposed them to fearful risk of detection, dishonour, and death.

CHAPTER XII.

AMEER ALI STARTS ON A NEW EXPEDITION: THE ADVENTURES
HE MEETS WITH.

OUR meeting broke up, and I returned to prepare Azima for my departure. I had invented a tale to excuse my absence. I told her that the money which I had gained on my mercantile expedition to the Dukhun was now nearly expended; and although, in her society, and in the enjoyment of happiness such as I had never hoped for, I had been hitherto unwilling to leave my home, yet I could delay to do so no longer without absolute ruin staring us in the face. I added, that my father had placed a sum of money at my disposal for the purposes of trade; with which, if I met with the success

I had reasonable ground to hope for, from the letters of my correspondents at Nagpoor and other places, I could not fail of realizing a handsome profit—enough to allow us another continued enjoyment of peace and affluence.

Long and vainly she strove to overrule my determination, pointed out the dangers of the road, the risks to which I should be necessarily exposed, the pain my absence would cause to her; but finding these were of no avail, as I told her my plans had been long laid, and that I was even now expected at Saugor, where my agents had collected the horses I was to take for sale, she implored me to take her and our children with me, adding that travelling was a matter of no difficulty to her, and that the children would enjoy the change of scene and the bustle and novelty of the camp.

But this also I overruled. It would have been impossible to take her, not to mention the expense of her travelling-carriage; and at last, after much pleading and objections of the description I have mentioned, she consented to remain; and placing her under my father's care on the morning we were to depart, I took an affectionate farewell of her. Many were the charms and amulets she bound about my arms and

hung round my neck, which she had purchased from various wandering fakeers and holy moolas; and with streaming eyes she placed my hands upon the heads of my children and bade me bless them. I did so fervently and truly, for I loved them, Sahib, with a love as intense as were the other passions of my nature.

At last I left her. Leaving one's home is never agreeable, often painful; for the mind is oppressed with indistinct visions of distress to those one leaves behind, and is too prone to imagine sources from which it might spring, though in reality they exist not. It was thus with me; but the appearance of my gallant band, as they greeted my arrival among them with a hearty shout, soon dispelled my vague apprehensions, and my spirit rose when I found myself in the condition which had been the object of many a fervent aspiration. I was my own master, with men willing to obey me, and—Inshalla! I exclaimed to myself, now Ameer Ali's star is in the ascendant, and long will it gleam in brightness!

I have told you of the ceremonies which immediately preceded our departure on a former occasion; of course they were repeated on this; the omens were again declared to be favourable

by Motee-ram, who was our standard-bearer and director of all our ceremonies, as Bhudrinath had been ; and we proceeded, accompanied for some coss by my father and Hoosein, who stored my mind with the results of their long experience. Among other things both particularly urged me to avoid the destruction of women.

“ In olden times,” said my father, “ they were always spared ; even parties in which there might by chance be any, although in other respects good bunij, were abandoned on their account, as, our patroness being a female, the destruction of her sex was considered obnoxious to her, and avoided on every occasion. Moreover men are the only fit prey for men ; no soldier wars with women, no man of honour would lift a finger against them ; and you of all, my son, who have a beauteous wife of your own, will be the last to offer violence to any of her sex.”

“ Rely upon me that I will not,” said I ; “ I was, as you know, strongly against the fate of the unhappy women who died on my first expedition, and, you will remember, I had no hand in their deaths ; but I was overruled in my objections, first by Bhudrinath and afterwards by Surfuraz Khan, and what could I do ? And

it would be terrible indeed to think that the distresses of their party and the unknown fate of poor Bhudrinath were owing to the tardy, but too sure vengeance of our patroness."

"It may be so," said my father; "but let not that prey on your mind; both myself and Hoosein have killed many a woman in our time, and, as you know, no ill effects have resulted from it. But bear in mind what I have said, act with wisdom and discretion, and above all pay implicit attention to the omens, and your success and protection are sure."

We rode on, conversing thus, and when we arrived at the boundary stone of our village, we dismounted and embraced each other, and I left them and rode on with my men.

According to our rules, no one was to shave or eat *pān* until our first victim fell; and as this was a matter of inconvenience to many of the men, you may be sure we had our eyes in all directions, and our scouts well occupied in every village we passed through or halted at. But it was not till the fifth day that we met with any one who offered a secure and in every way eligible sacrifice; we had fallen in with bands of travellers, some going to, and others departing from, their homes, but they had inva-

riably women in their company, and them I was determined to spare, as well for my wife's sake as from the injunctions of my father.

However, as I have said, on the fifth day, early in the morning, we came to a cross-road, and were glad to see a party of nine travellers, three upon ponies, having the appearance of respectable men, and the rest on foot, coming up the road a short distance from us. To our great joy they struck into the road we were about to take. We had halted in pretended indecision as to the road, and when they came up we asked it of them. They readily pointed to the one before us, and although expressing themselves astonished at our numbers, they agreed to accompany us to the village where we proposed to halt, and the road to which we had inquired of them. I soon entered into conversation with the most respectable of their party; and I replied, in answer to his inquiries, that we were soldiers proceeding, after our leave to Hindostan, to Nagpoor, where we were in service. He told me in return, that he and his brother, one of the two others mounted, with a friend and some attendants, were on a travelling expedition; that they had come from Indoor, and were going to Benares, as

well for the purchase of cloths and brocades, as to visit that sacred place of Hindoo pilgrimage.

Ho, ho ! thought I, these are assuredly men of consequence going in disguise, and I have no doubt are well furnished with ready cash. No time must be lost, as they have come by a cross-road, and have not been seen in our company ; there can consequently be no trace by which we could possibly be suspected on their disappearance ; so the sooner they are dealt with the better. To this end I lagged behind a little, and imparted my determination to Peer Khan, who rode in the rear of all ; by him it was told to another, and thus it circulated throughout the band before we had gone far. I was gratified and delighted to see how, as they became aware of what was to be done, each took his station, three Thugs to each traveller, and the rest disposed themselves around the whole, so as to prevent any possibility of escape.

I remembered the road well, for it was that upon which we had travelled before ; and what Thug ever forgets a road ? I knew also that, although the country around us was open and bare, there was a river not far off, the sandy bed of which was full of the wild cypress, and

the bodies could be easily disposed of in the brush-wood.

When we arrived at the brink of the river, the man I had continued to converse with begged for a short halt.

“ We have been travelling since midnight,” said he, “ and I for one am well tired, and should be glad of rest.”

I made no objection of course, for it was the very thing I wished ; and dismounting, and leading my horse to the water, I allowed him to drink, and then joined the party, which had all collected, and were now seated ; the travellers discussing a hasty meal they had brought with them, and the Thugs sitting or standing around them, but all in their proper places.

I was on the point of giving the *ghirnee*, and I saw the Bhuttotes handling their roomals in a significant manner, when, thanks to my quick sense of hearing, I distinguished voices at a distance. It was well for us that I had not given the signal ; we should have been busily engaged in stripping the bodies when the party I had heard would have come upon us. Of course they would have seen at a glance what we were about, and have taken the alarm. But our good destiny saved us. I hesitated, as

I have said, and in a few minutes fourteen travellers made their appearance, and came directly up to where we were sitting. They were persons of all descriptions, who had associated for mutual protection, and I had half determined to destroy them also, which I think we could have done, when they relieved me greatly by taking their departure, wishing us success and a pleasant and safe journey.

On one pretence or another I delayed our associates until the other party had proceeded far beyond the risk of hearing any noise, should there be any; and now, seeing everything ripe for the purpose, I called out for some tobacco, the word we had agreed to use, as being least likely to attract attention or inspire suspicion. I had planted myself behind the man I had been speaking to, and as I spoke my handkerchief was thrown! Three years' rest had not affected the sureness of my hold, and he lay a corpse at my feet in an instant. My work was done, and I looked around to see the fate of the rest; one poor wretch alone struggled, but his sufferings were quickly ended, and the party was no more!

"Quick, my lads!" cried I to the Lughaees, "quick about your work!" One of them grinned.

“Why?” said he; “did you not observe Doolum and four others go away to yon brush-wood when we reached this spot? Depend upon it they have the grave ready, or they have been idle dogs.”

And it was even so; the grave had been dug while the unsuspecting travellers sat and conversed with us.

We were so busily engaged in stripping the dead, that no one observed the approach of two travellers, who had come upon us unawares. Never shall I forget their horror when they saw our occupation; they were rooted to the spot from extreme terror; they spoke not, but their eyes glared wildly as they gazed, now at us and now at the dead.

“Miserable men,” said I, approaching them, “prepare for death! you have been witnesses of our work, and we have no resource but your destruction for our own preservation.”

“Sahib,” said one of them, collecting his energies, “we are men, and fear not to die, since our hour is come;” and he drew himself up proudly and gazed at me. He was a tall, powerful man, well armed, and I hesitated to attack him.

“I give you one alternative,” said I; “become

a Thug, and join our band—you shall be well cared for, and you will prosper.”

“Never!” he exclaimed; “never shall it be said that Tilluk Singh, the descendant of a noble race of Rajpoots, herded with murderers, and lived on their unblest gains. No! if I am to die, let it be now. Ye are many; but if one among you is a man, let him step forward, and here on this even sand I will strike one blow for my deliverance;” and he drew his sword, and stood on the defensive.

“I am that man,” cried I, though the band with one voice earnestly dissuaded me from the encounter, and declared that he was more than a match for me: “I am that man; now take your last look on the heavens and the earth, for by Alla you never quit this spot!”

“Come on, boasting boy!” he exclaimed; “give me but fair play, and bid none of your people interfere, and it may not be as you say.”

“Hear, all of you;” cried I to them, “meddle not in this matter—’t is mine and mine only. As for the other, deal with him as ye list;” and in an instant more he was numbered with the dead.

“These are your cowardly tricks,” cried the Rajpoot, now advancing on me, for he had stood contemplating the fate of his companion;

“my end may follow his, but I shall die the death of a soldier, and not that of a mangy dog as he has done.”

I have before told you, Sahib, that my skill in the use of every weapon was perfect, thanks to my good instructor; and I had never relaxed in those manly exercises which fit a man for active combat whenever he shall be called into it. My sword was the one Nuwab Subzee Khan had so much admired, and I felt the confidence of a man when he has a trusty weapon in his hand and knows how to wield it.

I have said that the Rajpoot advanced on me; he had no shield, which gave me an immense advantage, but the odds were in his favour from his height and strength, yet these are a poor defence against skill and temper.

He assailed me with all his force and fury; blow after blow I caught on my sword and shield, without striking one myself; he danced round me after the fashion of his people, and now on one leg now on the other, he made wild gyrations, and at intervals rushed upon me, and literally rained his blows at my person; but I stood fixed to the spot, for I knew how soon this mode of attack must exhaust him, and the loose sand of the river added to his fatigue.

At length he stood still and glared on me, panting for breath. "Dog of a Kafir!" cried he, "son of an unchaste mother, will nothing provoke thee to quit that spot?"

"Kafir!" I exclaimed, "and son of a Kafir, thy base words have sealed thy fate;" and I rushed on him. He was unprepared for my attack, made a feeble and uncertain blow at me, which I caught on my shield, and the next instant my sword had buried itself deep in his neck. He fell, and the blood gushed from the wound and from his mouth.

"Shookur Khoda!" exclaimed Peer Khan, "you have settled his business nobly; let me embrace thee;" and he folded me in his arms.

The Rajpoot was not dead; he had sufficient strength remaining to raise himself up on his arm, and he looked at me like a devil; he made many attempts to speak; his lips moved, but no sound followed, as the blood prevented utterance.

"Some of you put him out of his pain," said I; "the man behaved well, and ought not to suffer."

Peer Khan took my sword and passed it through his heart; he writhed for an instant, and the breath left his body.

"Away with him!" cried I, "we have loitered too long already."

The Lughaees took him by his legs and arms, to avoid his blood, and carried him away; others strewed a quantity of dry sand over the spot where he had fallen, and in a few minutes more we were pursuing our way as if nothing had happened.

After this proof of my personal courage and skill, I may safely say I was almost adored by the whole band. They all assured me that a Thug having killed a traveller and a soldier in fair open combat was an unprecedented circumstance, and only required to be known to make me the envy of old and young, and I gloried in what I had done; their praise was sweet incense to my vanity.

The booty we got from the merchant and his brother was rich, and was of itself a fair amount of booty for any expedition. Some were even for turning back, but they were only two or three voices, and were easily overruled.

“It would be a shame,” I said, “if while fortune favoured us we did not take advantage of our good luck.”

Sahib, we continued our march, and when we had reached Saugor we had killed nineteen other travellers, without however having obtained much plunder: ten, fifteen, and on one occa-

sion only nearly a hundred rupees, were as much as any of them afforded us.

The town of Saugor was, and is now, a large and busy place, built on the edge of an immense lake, nearly as large as that of the Hoosein Sagor; the cooling breezes which travel over it make it a delightful spot. We encamped on the border of the lake near the town.

For the four days we remained there, we daily perambulated the bazars, and frequented the shops of Bhuttearas, one of whom was well known to Peer Khan, and whom we paid handsomely for information. He promised to be on the look-out for us, and on the third day after our arrival, Peer Khan came to me in the evening, as I sat before the entrance of my little tent, smoking and enjoying the delightful breeze which came over the vast sheet of water spread before me.

“Meer Sahib,” said he, “the Bhutteara is faithful; he has got news of a Sahoukar going our road, who is to leave this place in about a week; he says we are certain of him, but that we must quit this spot, and march about within a few coss of the town, leaving two or three men with him to carry information.”

“Ul-humd-ul-illa!” cried I, “he is a worthy

man ; we will listen to his advice, and be off to-morrow early. Three of the best runners shall stay here as he counsels to bring us the news."

"But he stipulates for a large reward in case we are successful."

"I see nothing against it," said I : "he will be worthy of it if he is true to his word."

"Oh, for that you need not fear ; he is faithful so long as you pay him."

"Then he shall have it. How much does he want?"

"Two hundred rupees if we get five thousand," he replied ; "double, if we get ten ; and in proportion if between one and the other."

"If the Sahoukar is rich, Khan," said I, "we can well spare what he asks ; so go and tell him he shall have it."

"I go," he said ; "should I not return, conclude that I have staid with him."

He sought out the men he required to accompany him, and taking them and a small bundle of clothes with him, I watched him far beyond the precincts of our camp on his way to the town.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW AMEER ALI PLAYED AT THE OLD GAME OF FOX-AND-GOOSE, AND WON IT.

WE travelled from village to village for four days, meeting with no adventure, and in truth I was beginning to be weary of the delay and inactivity, when, on the fifth morning, one of the men we had left behind to bring information arrived.

“Peer Khan, Sahib, sends his salam,” said he, “and requests you will return immediately, as the bunij has been secured, and is about to leave the city.”

“Know you aught of who he is?”

“No, I do not,” Meer Sahib. “I lived at the Bhutteara’s, and he and the Jemadar were often

in earnest conversation about him, but I was not let into the secret."

"'Tis well," I replied; "refresh yourself, and be ready to accompany us. How far are we from Saugor?"

"By the way I came about fourteen coss," said he, "but by a path which I know the city is not more than half the distance."

"Then we may be there by evening?"

"Certainly, by noon if you please, and I will conduct you now."

Accordingly, guided by him through a wild track which I should never have found alone, we reached Saugor towards evening, and after occupying our former ground, I hurried to the Bhutteara's, where I was pretty sure of meeting my friends.

Peer Khan was there, and welcomed me. "I was fearful the messenger would miss you," said he; "but, praise to Alla, you are come."

"And this is our worthy ally, I suppose?" said I, making a salutation to the Bhutteara.

"The same," he answered; "your poor slave Peroo is always happy when he can serve his good friends."

"I have not forgotten what you are to get, my friend," said I, "and you may depend on the

word of a true Thug for it. Are we sure of the man?"

"As sure," said Peer Khan, "as of those who have hitherto fallen; tomorrow he will take his last look on Saugor."

"Ul-humd-ul-illa!" I exclaimed; "so much the better. And he will be a good bunij you think?"

"He will be worth seven or eight thousand good rupees to you," said the Bhutteara; "and all *nugd* (ready money) too."

"Good again, friend; but why do you not take to the road? You are a likely fellow enough."

"Oh, I have tried it already," said he laughing; "I was out on two expeditions with Ganesha Jemadar. Do you know him?"

"I have heard of him," I replied; "he is a leader of note."

"He is," said the Bhutteara; "but he is a cruel dog; and to tell the truth,—I fear you will think me a coward for it,—I did not like the way he treated the poor people he fell in with; so I quitted active work, and only do a little business as you see now, by which I pick up a trifle now and then."

"Well," said I, "you do good it appears;

but beware how you act, and see that you do not bully poor Thugs out of their money by threatening to denounce them."

The fellow winced a little at my observation, but recovering himself he stoutly protested he had never been guilty of so base an act.

Peer Khan threw me a sly look, as much as to say, you have hit the right nail on the head; but I did not press the matter further, for we were completely in his power.

"Then," said I, "we start in the morning I suppose?"

"Do so," replied the man; "the Sahoukar goes to Jubbulpoor. It would be as well not to show yourselves for some days, as he might take the alarm, and some people of note have disappeared of late on the road."

"Now," said I to Peer Khan, "we have no further business here, and I am tired; let us go to the camp. We can send two scouts to remain here, to give us intelligence of the Sahoukar's departure if necessary."

The men were instructed in what they had to do, and we left them and the Bhutteara.

"You probed that rascal deeply by what you said," said Peer Khan as we walked along; "it is the very practice by which he gets his

money; the fellow is as rich as a Sahoukar by this means, and never omits to levy a contribution on every gang which passes Saugor."

"Then," said I, "my mind is made up as to his fate. Such a wretch is not fit to live—a cowardly rascal, who sits at his ease, runs no risk, undergoes no fatigue, and yet gets the largest share of any one. He ought to die. What say you to putting him to death?"

"It is a rare plan," replied he; "but how to get him out of the town I know not; he is as wary as a fox."

"Oh," said I, "that is more easily managed than you think. The Kafir is fond of money?"

"As fond as he is of his own miserable existence."

"Then, Peer Khan, we have him. Directly we get to the camp I will send a man with a message, which you shall hear me deliver, and if it does not bring him, call Ameer Ali a father and grandfather of jackasses."

"Good," said he laughing; "we will see this rare plan of yours; but I tell you the villain is most wary. I never knew him come out except in broad daylight, when there was no danger, and then only to small parties."

“Here, Junglee,” said I to a smart young fellow who always attended my person; “you know Peroo, the Bhutteara?”

“Certainly; my lord was with him this afternoon. I know his house, for I was in the bazar purchasing some flour, and saw my lord at the shop.”

“Good,” said I; “then you will have no need to inquire for it. Now go to the Bhutteara, and take my seal-ring with you: mind you don’t let it go out of your hand; tell him, with many compliments from me, that as we are so sure by his kindness of the bunij in prospect, and have some money with us, I will pay him what he asks, if he will come here to receive it. Say that I do so as our return by this road is uncertain and may be at a distant period, and that I shall have no means of sending him the coin; and add, that I do this favour to him, as I am convinced of his good faith, and have placed implicit reliance in his assertions. Now, can you remember all this? Mind you speak to him in Ramasee,—he understands it.”

“Certainly,” said the lad; “I know all.” And he repeated what I had told him word for word.

“That will do,” said I, “and here is the ring : now be off,—run, fly, and let us see how soon you will earn two rupees.”

“I am gone, Jemadar Sahib,” cried he joyfully. “I will be back instantly.”

“That is a sharp lad,” said Peer Khan ; “he takes one’s meaning so readily. But Oh Meer Sahib, Peroo will never come for that message ; he is too old a bird to be caught with chaff.”

“Depend on it he will ; he will hear the tinkling of the silver, and will run to it as ever lover did to his mistress’s signal. Besides he has no chaff in prospect, but rupees, man, rupees. The fellow would run to Delhi for as much.”

“We shall see,” said Peer Khan. “If it be written in his fate that he is to come, why, Alla help him, come he must, there is no avoiding destiny. What ! Peroo the Bhutteara come out of his house at night to visit Thugs ! I say the thing is impossible ; it has often been tried, and failed utterly ; the fellow laughed at them, as well he might.”

“For all your doubts, Khan,” said I, “In-shalla ! we will throw earth on his beard to-night ; and as we may as well be ready, call

Motee, and two or three Lughaees; the grave must be dug, and that immediately."

Motee came, but was as desponding of success as Peer Khan. "You will never take him," he said; "did not Ganesha offer to divide a large booty here last year, and that Peeroo should have a share if he would come to take it? and he sent word that he laughed at our beards, and we had better leave his share in the hollow of an old tree known to us, or he would send the whole police of Saugor after us in the morning."

"And so you left the share?"

"We did, and it was a good one too."

"Then Ganesha was an owl, and I will tell him so if I ever meet him. Peroo should not have had a cowree from me; nor will he now unless he comes to take it."

We were silent for some time, and I could hear the dull blows of the pickaxe, as the sound was borne by the chill night-wind from the place where the grave was preparing. He will come, thought I, and his iniquity will be ended: shame on the cold-blooded coward who can sell men's lives as he does, without striking a blow against them! As I was thus musing, our messenger was seen, in the dusky light, returning at

the top of his speed, and alone. "We told you so!" cried both my associates triumphantly; "we told you how it would be!"

I was vexed, and bit my lips to conceal my chagrin. "Let us hear what he says at any rate," said I.

"Well, what news, Junglee?" cried I, as he ran up quite out of breath.

"Wait a moment, Jemadar," said he, "till I can speak: I have run hard."

"Here, drink some water: it will compose you. What has happened? Is there any alarm?"

"Ah, no alarm," replied the lad, "but listen. I went as fast as I could without running, for I thought if I appeared out of breath when I reached him he might suspect something; so when I got to the town gate, I walked slowly till I reached his shop. He was busy frying kabobs for some travellers, and told me to go into his private room and wait for him. In a short time he came to me.

"Well," said he, "what news? Why have you come? The bunij is safe; it was but just now that one of your scouts came and said he had heard orders given for his departure to-morrow. What do you want?"

“So I repeated your message, word for word as you delivered it to me, and he seemed much agitated. He walked up and down the room for some time, talking to himself, and I could hear the words ‘Ganesha’, ‘treachery’, once or twice repeated. So at last I grew tired of this, and said to him, ‘I cannot wait, I have orders to return immediately: will you come or not?’ and this stopped him; he turned round and looked at me severely—

“‘Tell me,’ said he, ‘young man, was Mottee-ram present when this message was delivered?’

“‘No, he was not,’ I replied.

“‘Did he know of it?’

“‘No; he had not returned from the town when I received it; at any rate, neither I nor the Jemadar Sahib saw him.’

“‘Was Peer Khan present?’

“‘No,’ said I stoutly, ‘he was not.’

“‘But he left this place in company with your master.’

“‘He may have done so,’ said I, ‘but I did not see him; I was preparing the Jemadar’s bedding when he returned, and the message was delivered to me privately; for after he lay down to rest he called to me and delivered it:

and I may as well tell you that he counted out the money from a bag which was under his pillow.'

" 'How much was there set apart for me?'

" 'Two hundred and fifty rupees; he was counting more, but he stopped short, put the rest into the bag, and said it would be enough.'

" 'And how much is in the bag?'

" 'Alla maloom !' said I; 'how should I know anything about it?'

" 'Who sleep in the tent with the Jemadar?' he asked, after another silence and a few more turns about the room.

" 'No one,' said I. 'I sleep across the doorway; but no one is ever allowed to enter.'

" 'You are a good lad,' he rejoined, 'and a smart fellow. How should you like to be a bhutteara?'

" 'Well enough,' said I; for I wanted to see what he was diving at, and I suspected no good."

" 'Did you ever hear of such a rascal?' said Peer Khan. " 'Oh, if we only had him, I would wring the base neck off his shoulders.'"

" 'Let him go on,' said I; " 'don't interrupt him.'"

" 'Well,' continued Junglee, " he paced to

and fro again several times, and at last came and sat by me, and took my hand in his. I did not like it, so I laid my other on the hilt of my dagger, which was concealed in my waist-band.

“ ‘Junglee,’ said he to me, ‘thou art a good lad, and may be to me a son if thou wilt aid me in this matter. Young as thou art, this bloody trade can have no charms for thee ; besides I’ll warrant your Jemadar does not make a pet of you as I would, and obliges you to work hard?’

“ I nodded.

“ ‘Ay ! it is even so,’ said he, ‘and thou wouldst be free ? speak, boy, and fear not ; thou shalt be a son to me. Alla help me ! I have neither wife nor child.’

“ I nodded again.

“ ‘That is right,’ continued he ; ‘although you are ill used, you do not like to abuse the salt you have eaten, and I like you the better for it. Now listen to me. I will come, but not now. You say you lie at the entrance of the tent,—good : you must sleep as sound as if you had taken opium—do you hear ? I shall step quietly over you, and I know an old trick of tickling with a straw—do you understand?’

“‘I do,’ said I; ‘you would have the large bag.’

“‘Exactly so, my son,’ said he, ‘you have guessed rightly; trust me, I will have it. As I go away I will touch you; you need not follow me then, but you can watch your opportunity.’

“‘But the scouts,’ added I; ‘you have not thought of them.’

“‘Oh, I can easily avoid them; the night is dark and cloudy, and no one will see me; I shall strip myself naked, and throw a black blanket over me.’

“‘Then I agree,’ said I; ‘and I will quit those horrid people and become an honest man. Now what am I to say to the Jemadar?’

“‘Say,’ replied he, ‘that the herdsman’s flock had often been robbed by the wolf of its fattest sheep; and the herdsman said to himself, I will catch the wolf and put him to death. And he dug a hole, and suspended a fat lamb over it in a basket, and sat and watched; and the wolf came, and saw from afar off that there was something unusual in the generosity of the herdsman, and he said to himself, Wolf, thou art hungry, but why should one lamb tempt thee? the time will come when thou mayest

find the herdsman asleep ; so wait, although thy stomach is empty.—Say this to the Jemadar and he will understand thee.’ ”

“ By Alla ! thou hast done well, Junglee,” said I, “ and thy faithfulness shall surely be well rewarded. What think you, my friends, of this villain ? ”

“ Ah, we are not astonished,” cried both, “ i is just like him ; but Inshalla ! he will fall into his own snare.”

“ Now,” said I, “ call two of the scouts ; ” and they came.

After I had told them of the plot Peeroo had formed, “ My friends,” I continued, “ you must allow this rascal to come into the camp : one of you lie down close to my tent, and pretend to be asleep ; but have your eyes open, and directly you see him enter rouse Peer Khan and Motee, and bring them to the entrance ; and do you two then place yourselves one on each side of the door, so that he cannot see you. I shall feign to be asleep, and shall let him take the bag, though he should even fall over me in doing so ; as he comes out you can seize him and hold him fast ; do him no harm till I come : and as for you, Junglee, if you do not sleep as sound as though a seer of opium was

in your stomach, I swear by Alla you shall lie in the same grave with him."

"Do not fear me," said the lad; "I have eaten your salt, you are my father and my mother, you have treated me kindly, and how could I deceive you? had I intended it, I had not mentioned a word of what he told me."

"Then we are all prepared," said I. "Did he say when he would come?"

"He did," said Junglee; "in the second watch of the night, when he had no more business."

"Good; then mind you are all ready, and we will spit on his beard."

Anxiously to me did the hours pass, till the time came when I might expect him. I went out of my little tent repeatedly to see that all were at their proper posts, and returned as often, satisfied that they were. Peer Khan was lying near my tent apparently in a sound sleep, but I knew he was awake; the scouts were wandering lazily about; above all, the night was so dark that I could not see my hand before me, and the splashing and murmuring of the tiny waves of the lake upon the shore would prevent any noise of his footsteps being heard. "Yes," I said, half aloud, as I retired to

my carpet for the last time, "he will come; thief as he is, he will not miss such a night as this: but the darkness favours us as much as it does him."

"Now, Junglee," said I, "this is the last time I stir out; mind your watch, my good lad, and I will not forget you; Peer Khan is close at the back of the tent: I care not much about the rest, they will soon be collected when he is caught."

"Do not fear me," said the boy; "my eyes are not heavy with sleep, and when I move from this spot to call Peer Khan, a rat will not hear me."

I went in and lay down; I drew my trusty blade and laid it close to my right hand, so that I could grasp it in a moment; and covering myself up with my quilt, as well to hide it as to assure me when he came, (for I knew he would endeavour to pull it off me,) I continued to stare stedfastly on the entrance of the tent; and my eyes becoming sensible of the greater darkness of the inside than that of the outside, I was certain that if any one entered, or even passed the door, I should see him. Long, long did I lie in this position; I hardly stirred, lest Peeroo should be outside listening whether I

was awake. It was now, I guessed, considerably past midnight; still no one came, and I should have been inclined to despair, did I not feel certain that his fate would lead him to destruction. Why is it, Sahib, that one has these presentiments? I have often felt them during my lifetime, but I never could account for them.

At last he came. I saw an object darken the doorway, hesitate for a moment, and then pass in over the body of Junglee, who snored so loudly and naturally that I could have declared he was asleep, had I not known the contrary by having spoken to him a short time before. Alla! Alla! Sahib, how my heart beat!—I could hear its throbbings, and they seemed to be so loud in my breast that I thought he would hear them too. Another thought flashed across me—could he be armed? and would he attempt to destroy me? It might be; and I almost trembled as I thought how I was to lie inactive and in his power while he abstracted the bag; I was on the point of leaping up and passing my weapon through his body, but I dismissed the idea. He is a thief, a miserable thief, and has not the courage to bring a weapon, much less to use it; and he will want both his hands too—he cannot have

one. So I lay quiet, with my hands on the hilt of my sword. The tent was very low, and he was obliged to advance stooping: he reached my side and knelt down, and as I feigned the hard breathing of sleep, I felt his warm breath when he looked over me and into my eyes to see whether I really slept or not. He appeared satisfied that I did, for he instantly thrust his hand under the pillow, but so quietly that I could not have felt it had I been asleep: but the bag was not on that side, it was under my other ear; he felt it, but found, I suppose, that he could not abstract it without his awakening me; so he felt about on the ground for a piece of straw or a blade of grass, and began tickling my ear on the side next to him. I obeyed the intention of the action, and turned towards him with a grunt: it startled him, and he was still for a moment; but again his hand was groping; I felt the bag recede—recede till it was withdrawn from the pillow; I heard the clink of the money as he placed it on his shoulder, and I was content: I saw too that Junglee was not at the door, (though when he had gone I know not—having been too much occupied by my own situation,) and that the Bhutteara was aware of it. He stopped, and

murmured in a low tone, "Strange that he should be gone ; but he knows the way and will not disappoint me." Another step, and he was beyond the threshold, and in the rough grasp of Peer Khan, Motee, and a dozen others.

"Capitally managed !" cried I, as I ran to the door and joined the group : "strike a light, one of you ; let us see the face of this Roostum among thieves—a fellow who dares to rob a Thug's camp, and defy him to his beard."

A light was brought, and there stood the trembling wretch with the bag of rupees still on his shoulder, and clutching it as though it were his own.

"Ha !" said I, "so it is you, Peeroo, and the wolf who was so wary has fallen into the hands of the shepherds at last ; he would not take the little bait, but the large flock was well watched, and he has fallen into the trap. And now, rascal," I continued, "thou wouldst have robbed us, and dost deserve to die, yet upon thy answers to the questions I will put to thee depends thy life or death."

"Name them, oh name them !" said the wretch ; "let me live,—I will set off without delay, I will even accompany you ; you may turn me out from among you in the jungle, and

if ever my face is seen in Saugor again or on this road, deal with me as ye list."

"Very good," said I; "now answer the following questions. Is the bunij you have promised false?"

"As true as that I breathe: ah, Meer Sahib, have not your men seen the preparations, and will not you hear the same tomorrow from them? how could you doubt it?"

"How much money will you give us to let you go? I want two thousand rupees."

"Ai Méré Sahib! Méré Sahib!" cried the wretch; "two thousand rupees! where am I to get them? I have not a cowree in the world."

"It is a lie," said Motee and several others; "you have thousands of rupees which you have bullied poor Thugs out of; we could name a hundred instances in which you have taken money from us: how dare you deny it?"

"Look here," said I, "here is the roomal, and you know the use of it; say whether you will give the money or not."

"I will give it," said he; "I will swear on the pickaxe to do so, and do you come with me and take it."

"Ay," said I, "and be taken too ourselves! no, no, friend Bhutteara, do not try to throw

dust on our beards after that fashion. Inshalla ! the people who could catch you have sharper wits than you seemed to give them credit for : no, man, I was but joking with thee—where is all thy wealth concealed ?”

“ You may kill me if you will,” said he, “ but I give no answer to that question.”

“ Ah, well,” cried I, “ you may think better of it when you are choking ; now you two hold him fast, and take the bag off his shoulders.”

They did so. I threw the roomal about his neck, and tightened it till he was almost choked : he made several attempts to speak, and at last I relaxed my hold a little ; but he could not utter a word—fear of death had paralysed his powers of utterance.

“ Give him some water,” said I, “ it will wash down his fright.”

He took it, and fell at my feet, and implored me to spare him. I spurned and kicked him.

“ Where is the treasure ?” I said : “ you have felt the tightening of the roomal once, beware how you risk it again : where is the treasure ?”

“ Promise to let me live and I will tell,” cried the Bhutteara, trembling in every limb.

“ I will promise,” said I ; “ you shall remain here, and I will send people to bring it ; you

well know we have no time for delay, and if you trifle with us you know the result—you have already half felt it.”

“Where is Motee-ram? he knows the spot.”

“Liar! I know it not,” cried Motee, stepping forward; “do you wish to make me out to be a participator in your base gains?”

“You know the spot,” continued the Bhut-teara, “but you do not know that there is aught there; you remember the old hollow mango-tree on the other side of the town, where you left the last share I got from Ganesha?”

“I do.”

“Well, then, you must dig in the hollow of the trunk; about a cubit deep you will find all I have—gold, silver, and ornaments.”

“Now,” said I, “villain, I have kept my word, you *shall* remain here; the grave is dug which shall hold thee, and has been ready for hours: I swore that I would spit on thy beard before morning, and Bhowanee, whose votaries thou hast bullied and threatened, has delivered thee into my hands:” and I spat on him; all the men who were near me did the same.

“Again,” cried I, “hold him fast, and bring the tobacco.” He knew the fatal jhirnee, and struggled to be free; but he was a child in the

power of those who held him--in an instant more he was dead !

“ Off with you, Motee !” cried I ; “ take ten men and go to the spot he mentioned ; he may have told the truth, and we shall be the richer for it ; then will many a man cry Wah ! Wah ! when he hears of this deed.”

The body was taken away and buried, the grave was smoothed over and beaten down, the place plastered over, some fireplaces made, and fires lighted to blacken them, and our work was concealed.

Now did not that villain deserve his fate, Sahib ? To my perception, his cold-blooded work was far worse than our legitimate proceedings ; and as for his treachery, he paid the forfeit of it.

It was a fearful revenge, said I ; but you spoilt the justice of it by your vile love of plunder. Why should you have promised him his life, and then have murdered him ? that was base.

I did not promise it to him ; I said he should remain where he was, and he did remain—ay, he is there now.

It was a nice distinction certainly, Ameer Ali, and only shows the more how little you are

to be trusted. But how did you get on afterwards,—had he told the truth about his money?

He had, replied the Thug. Long before morning Motee returned, and rousing me, poured at my feet a heap of gold and silver coins, necklaces, armlets, bracelets, and anklets. They were worth nearly three thousand rupees, and not one article of them was there but had been given him by Thugs. Motee, Peer Khan, and others recognised most of the property. We melted all the ornaments, and divided the whole at our next stage, and it was a good booty, and enriched us for a long time; indeed I may say it lasted till our return home.

And the Sahoukar, I asked, was the news true about him?

Oh, quite true, said Ameer Ali; I will tell you of him. We left Saugor early, and at a short distance on the road sat down to eat the goor, as is usual with us after any adventure. While we were thus employed, one of the scouts came up, and told us the joyful news that the Sahoukar had left the town, and was close behind us, and that the other, whose name was Bhikaree, had taken service with him as far as Jubbulpoor as an attendant, to watch at night while the Sahoukar slept.

“And how does he travel?” I asked.

“He is on a tattoo, a good strong beast,” said the scout, “and has two others laden with him, and there are four men besides himself and Bhikaree.”

“Good,” said I. “Now, my lads, we must push on ; the Sahoukar must see nothing of us for some days, and till then I shall avoid all others.”

We hastened on, and got to the end of our stage. Three days we travelled quietly, and from time to time observed the omens ; they were all favourable, and cheered us on. On the fourth, as if by accident, we contrived to fall in with the Sahoukar and his people ; our faithful Bhikaree we rejoiced to see in his train. It was in the road that we met with him, or rather allowed him to overtake us, and the usual salutations passed. I was well dressed and well mounted, and looked a soldier. He inquired our destination and business, to which the old story was answered, and we proceeded merrily along. The Sahoukar was a fat, jolly fellow, and witty in his way, and stories were interchanged, and we all laughed heartily at his jokes. It is astonishing, Sahib, how soon these trifles engender good will and friendship

among travellers: the loneliness of the road and the weariness of the stage are forgotten in such pleasant conversation; and before we had reached the end of the stage we were as great friends as though we had travelled together for months, or known each other for years. A kind farewell was interchanged as we parted at the village; he to put up inside it, in the bazar, and we to our old plan of encampment.

“Tomorrow,” said I to the assembled men, “is a good day, it is Friday: we must finish this business.” All were agreed upon it, and at midnight the Bélhas and Lughaees went on, the former to choose a spot for the affair, and the latter to dig the grave.

At daylight, a man (our Bhikaree it was,) came to say the Sahoukar would wait for us at the other side of the village, and begged we would be quick, as he liked our company, and wished for the safety of our escort.

“I have been frightening him a little,” continued he, “and in truth he has been in alarm ever since he left Saugor, for he had heard of the disappearance of some parties on the road last year; so when we met you yesterday he was highly delighted, and afterwards spoke

warmly of you, Jemadar Sahib, and said he could feel no fear in your society."

"Well done," cried I; "thou too hast played thy part well, and it shall not be forgotten; but, my friends, the Sahoukar waits, and we had better be moving; do you all surround his party as you did yesterday; ply them with tales and stories, and keep their minds quiet."

"Jey Bhowanee! Jey Ameer Ali!" was the shout of the party as we quitted the ground and took our way to the spot where the Sahoukar awaited us.

CHAPTER XIV.

“CATESBY.—’T is a vile thing to die, my gracious lord,
When men are unprepared and look not for it.”

RICHARD III. Act iii. Sc. 2.

“RAM ! Ram ! Meer Sahib,” was the salutation of the Sahoukar as we met at the spot whither Bhikaree had guided us. “Ram ! Ram ! I am glad you have condescended to keep company with your poor servant, for truly the sweet savour of your fluent discourse has left a longing in my heart to hear more of it, and happily I am so far favoured.”

I returned the usual compliments, and we set forward on our journey. Gradually my band arranged themselves around their new victims. All were at their places, and I eagerly looked out for the first scout who should give us intel-

ligence that the bhil was ready. A strange feeling it is, Sahib, that comes over us Thugs at such moments : not a feeling of interest or pity for our victims, or compunction for the deed we are about to do, as perhaps you might expect to hear, but an all-absorbing anxiety for the issue of the adventure, an intense longing for its consummation, and a dread of interruption from passing travellers ; and though I had become now callous in a great measure, still my heart was throbbing with anxiety and apprehension, and my replies to the Sahoukar's witty and jolly remarks were vague and abstracted ; my whole thoughts were concentrated upon the affair in hand, and it was not to be wondered at. He remarked my altered behaviour, and I rallied myself, and was soon able to amuse him as I had done before.

“ Ah ! that is like yourself, Meer Sahib,” said he, as I had just given utterance to a joke which caused his fat sides to shake,—“ that is like yourself. Why, man, whose face did your first glance on awaking from sleep rest on ? Surely on some melancholy being, and you have partaken of his thoughts ever since.”

“ I know not, Sethjee,” I replied ; “ but you know that a man cannot always command the

same evenness of temper, and I confess that my thoughts were far away, at my home."

"Well," said he, "all I wish for you and myself is a safe return to our homes, for this travelling is poor work, and I have been unlucky enough to start on a very indifferent day after all my waiting. I had determined on leaving Saugor nearly a month ago, but on consulting the astrologer, he delayed me from time to time, declaring this day was bad and that day was worse, until I could stay no longer : and it was all to little purpose, and I pray Naraynu to protect me and you from all Thugs, thieves, and Dacoos."

"Ameen," said I; "I respond to your prayer most fervently, for I am on my way to my service, where we chance often to get harder knocks than we can bear. But do they say there are Thugs on the road, and who or what are they? the term is new to me."

"Whytruly I can hardly tell you, Meer Sahib. The Thugs, they say, are people who feign one thing or other, till they get unwary travellers into their power, and then destroy them; I have heard too that they have handsome women with them who pretend distress on the roads, and decoy travellers who may have soft hearts, to

help them ; then they fasten on them, and they have some charm from the Shitan which enables them to keep their hold till their associates come up, despite of all the efforts of the person so ensnared to gain his liberty. And that either thieves, or Thugs, or rascals of some kind or other do infest the highways is most true, for many travellers disappear in an unaccountable manner. But I do not fear ; I am in the company of honest men, and we are a large party, and they must be stout men or devils who would assail us."

I laughed inwardly at the Sahoukar's idea of Thugs, and had no doubt that Ganesha Jemadar was, if the truth were known, at the bottom of the disappearance of the travellers. But I answered gaily, "Ah ! no fear, my friend. These Thugs, as you say, may now and then light upon an unsuspecting single traveller and kill him, but no one would dare to touch a party like ours ; and Inshalla ! if any appear, we will let daylight into some of their skins ; there is nothing I love better than making keema (mince-meat) of these rascals. I have done so once or twice already, and I never found them stand when a sword was drawn. But yonder, I see, is one of my men sitting ; I wonder how he got on

before us. I will ask him. He must have started early to get a rest on the road ;” and as we reached him he slowly raised himself from the ground, and made his salutation to me and the Sahoukar ; he appeared tired and acted his part well.

“How is this, Ameer Singh ?” said I, “how is it that you are so much in advance of us ?”

“Oh,” replied he readily, “a thorn ran into my foot yesterday, and as I knew you would not wait for me, I started at midnight with a few others, who said they would be my companions, and we travelled on leisurely ; but I could not proceed further, as my foot was painful, and I determined to wait for the party here to get a lift on a pony.”

“You shall have it,” said I ; “mount the one which carries my baggage, and I will see that a barber examines your foot when we reach the end of the stage. But where are your companions ?”

“They said there was a small river in advance, about half a coss off, and they would proceed thither and wash their hands and faces ; they bade me tell you that, if I could not follow them, you would find them there.”

“Good,” said I, “and I am glad to hear

there is water near; we can dismount and refresh ourselves, for the stage is a long one: how say you, Séth Sahib? you Hindoos are as particular about your morning ablutions as we Moslems are."

"True, true," he replied; "the news is welcome, for my mouth is dry, and I have not as yet washed it; we will stop for a short time; besides, my stomach is empty, and I have sweetmeats with me which I will share with you, Meer Sahib; it is ill travelling without something in the inside."

"A good thought," I replied, "and I shall be glad of them; I usually bring some myself, but have neglected to do so in this instance."

The scout was right, the rivulet he mentioned was scarcely as far as he had said, and we reached it after a few minutes' riding; and sure enough there were my men sitting unconcerned by the edge of the water, busily discussing a hasty meal of some cakes they had brought with them.

"Bhillmanjeh, have you cleaned the hole?" I eagerly inquired of the Belha.

"Manjeh," he replied.

"What did you ask?" said the Sahoukar;

“if they have not a clean vessel for you to drink out of, you can have one of mine.”

“Thanks for your kindness,” I replied, “but my good fellow here tells me that he has brought one, and cleaned it ready for me.”

We all dismounted; the men rushed into the water, and were each and all busily employed in washing their mouths and teeth, and drinking of the pure element which murmured over its pebbly bed beneath their feet; but none of them quitted their stations, and only awaited the signal to do their work.

“Is the bhil far distant?” I asked of the Belha who presented me with a lota of water for the purposes of ablution.

“About an arrow’s flight,” said he, “down yonder in that thicket; it is a good place, and a well-known one; it was on this spot that Ganesha Jemadar had a rare bunij last year. But do not delay, for the sun is high, and travellers may be coming from the stage before us; this is the only running water on the road, and all hasten to it to refresh themselves.”

“Then I am ready,” said I; “and when you see me close to the Sahoukar, I will give the signal; I see the men are all prepared.” And I walked towards him.

“Why don’t you give the jhirnee?” said Motte-ram to me as I passed him, “we are all waiting for it.”

“Now,” said I, “be ready; I go to my station.”

The fellow near whom he was standing turned round, hearing us converse in a strange language; but he immediately afterwards sat down and resumed the operation of cleaning his teeth with great assiduity: there were two men behind him who would shortly save him the trouble!

“Why, Séthjee,” said I, “I wonder you do not go up higher; here you have the water muddied by all the fellows above you. Come with me, and I will show you a deep place where I have just washed, and where the water is clear.”

“Ah, I did not think of it,” said he; “I will follow you.” He had been washing low down, and as I got him into the middle of the party I gave the jhirnee.

Sahib, though I had not killed a man with the roomal for nearly four years, I had not forgotten my old trick: he was dead, I think, ere he reached my feet.

Stupid it was in us to delay, and I prevented the like in future. Every man resumed his em-

ployment of washing himself as though nothing had happened, and there lay the bodies on the sand. We were once again fated to be interrupted. Two travellers were seen approaching, and the bodies were hastily covered with sheets, as if those who lay beneath them were asleep; and I cried to the men for some of them to sit and others lie down, and all to feign great weariness. They did so, and the men came up; they were poor creatures, hardly worth killing, and I proposed to Peer Khan to let them go, but he would not hear of it.

“Let them go!” he cried; “are you mad? Do you not think that these fellows already suspect who we are? Does a man ever come into the presence of the dead, be they ever so well covered or disguised, without a feeling that they are dead? and see, some of our men are speaking to them; they are true bunij, and Davee has sent them.”

“As you will,” said I, “but there may be more of them.”

“Hardly so soon,” replied he; “these fellows must have left in the night to be here so early; but come, let us ask them.” And we walked up to them.

“Salam!” said I, “where are you from so

early? you have travelled fast if you have come from the stage we hope to reach in the course of the day; how far is it?"

"It is seven long coss," said the man, "and the sun will be high and hot before you reach it; but we are in haste and must proceed."

"Stay," said I, "dare not to move till you are allowed; and tell me, how many travellers put up last night in the village from whence you have come?"

"Two besides ourselves," replied the other of the two, evidently in alarm at my question. "Why do you ask?"

"Are you sure there were no more?"

"Certain," he replied; "we travelled together from Jubbulpoor, and put up in the same house."

"And how far are they behind you?"

"They will be here immediately, I should think, for we started at the same time but have outstript them."

"Good," said I; "now sit down there and wait till they come."

"Why is this?" cried both; "by what right do you detain travellers? we will go on."

"Dare to stir at your peril," said I; "you have intruded on us, and must pay the penalty."

“What penalty? Are you thieves? if so, take what you will from us and let us go.”

“We are not thieves,” said Peer Khan; “but stay quiet, we are worse.”

“Worse! then, brother, we are lost,” cried one to the other; “these villains are Thugs; it is even as I whispered to you when you must needs stop among them: they have been at their horrid work, and yonder lie those whom they have destroyed.”

“Yes,” said I, “unhappy men, you have guessed right; yonder lie the dead, and you will soon be numbered with them; it is useless to strive against your destiny.”

I turned away, for I felt, Sahib—I felt sick at the thoughts of destroying these inoffensive people. They might have passed on—but Peer Khan was right, they had detected the dead, though the bodies had been laid out and covered as if the senseless forms were sleeping—but they lay like lumps of clay. No measured breathing disturbed the folds of the sheets which covered them, and a glance had been sufficient to tell the tale to the unfortunate people who had seen them. But I shook off the feeling as best I could; had I given way to it, or betrayed its existence to my associates,

the power I possessed over them would have been lost—and it was the spirit of my existence.

“They must die,” said I to Peer Khan; “you were right, and they had guessed the truth; but I wish it had been otherwise, and the lazy Lughaees had done their work quickly; they might have passed on, and we have had a good morning’s work without them; they are not worth having.”

“I would not exchange places with them for anything you could name, Meer Sahib, and perhaps it were well to put them out of their suspense.”

“Do so, Peer Khan, and get the rest with them removed; I will deal with one of the other two coming up. These fellows are half dead already with fear, and the others I will fall on in my own way; I hate such passive victims as these will be.”

Peer Khan and another went to the miserable wretches, who remained sitting on the ground where we had left them. I watched them; they stood up mechanically when they were ordered to do so, and stretched out their necks for the fatal roomal, and were slain as unresistingly as sheep beneath the knife of the butcher.

The rest of the travellers were not long coming, and were only two, as the others had said.

“Now,” said I to Motee, “these fellows must be dealt with at once: you take one, I will the other; they must not utter a word.”

“I am ready,” said he; and we arose and lounged about the road.

The travellers came up. One was a young and the other an old man. I marked the young one, and as he passed me a Thug laid hold of his arm; he turned round to resent it, and I was ready. These too were carried away, and after collecting our dispersed party, we once more pursued our route without interruption.

It had been a good morning's work. The Sahoukar was as rich as the Bhutteara had said, and four thousand three hundred rupees greeted our expectant eyes as the contents of the laden ponies were examined: besides these there were six handsome shawls, worth better than a thousand more, and a few pieces of cotton cloth, which were torn up and immediately distributed. The other four travellers had upwards of a hundred rupees, a sum not to be despised, and which I divided equally among the band, reserving the large booty, and adding it to the sum we had already gained.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH IT IS CLEARLY SHOWN HOW HARD IT IS TO STOP
WHEN THE DEVIL DRIVES.

WE reached Jubbulpoor without another adventure of any kind, and rested there for two days. Peer Khan, Motee, and myself perambulated the bazars during the whole time, but not a traveller could we meet with, nor could we learn that any were expected ; it was therefore of no use to remain, and as we had still plenty of time before us, we could travel as leisurely as we pleased : so on the third morning we again proceeded.

The country between Jubbulpoor and Nagpoor is a wild waste. Villages are not met with for miles and miles, the road is stony and uneven, and the jungle thick and dangerous for nearly the whole way. On this account the tract

has always been a favourite resort of Thugs, and more affairs have come off in those few marches than perhaps in any other part of the country frequented by us. We were all regretting that we had not met with some bunij at Jubbulpoor, wherewith to beguile the weariness of the road, when at our second stage, soon after we had arrived, Motee, who had gone to look out for work for us, returned with the glad news that there was a palankeen at the door of a merchant's shop, surrounded by bearers and a few soldiers, which looked very much as if it belonged to a traveller.

"But he must be of rank," said Motee, "therefore I humbly suggest that you, Meer Sahib, should undertake to see who he is, and to secure him if possible."

I followed his advice, and changing my travelling attire for a dress which would ensure my civil reception, I armed myself, and, attended by a Thug who carried my hooka, I sauntered into the village. I soon saw the palankeen and men about it, and in order to gain some intelligence to guide me, I went to a small Tumbolees's shop directly opposite to it, and sitting down entered into conversation with the vendor of tobacco and pān.

"This is a wild country you live in, my friend," said I.

"Yes it is indeed as you say," he replied, "and were it not for you travellers, a poor man would have little chance of filling his belly by selling pān and tobacco, but, as it is, my trade thrives well."

"There do not seem to be many on the road," said I; "I have come from Jubbulpoor without meeting a soul."

"Why the roads are hardly much frequented yet," he rejoined, "but in a month more there will be hundreds; and there," he continued, pointing to the house over the way, "there is almost the only one I have seen for some time."

"Who is it?" I asked, "and where has he come from? he was not with us."

"I know not," replied the Tumbole, "nor do I care; whoever he is, he has bought a quantity of my stuff, and it was the first silver which crossed my hands this morning."

I saw there was nothing to be got out of this man, so I went to a Bunnea a little further off, and after a few preparatory and indifferent questions asked him whether he knew aught of the traveller; but he knew nothing either, ex-

cept that a slave girl had bought some flour of him. "They say," said he, "that it is a gentleman of rank who is travelling privately, and does not wish to be known; at any rate, Sahib, I know nothing about him; I suppose however he will come out in a short time."

This is very strange, thought I; here is a gay palankeen, eight bearers and some soldiers with it, come into this wretched place, and yet no one's curiosity is aroused; who can it be? I will return to the Tumbolees and sit awhile; I may see, though I cannot hear anything of this mysterious person.

I sat down at the shop, and calling to my attendant for my hooka remained there smoking, in the hope that some one might appear from behind the cloths which were stretched across the verandah: nor did I stay long in vain; I saw them gently move once or twice, and thought I could perceive the sparkle of a brilliant eye directed to me. I riveted my gaze on the envious purdah, and after a long interval it was quickly opened, and afforded me a transient momentary view of a face radiant with beauty; but it was as instantly closed again, and I was left in vain conjecture as to the beautiful but mysterious person who had thus par-

tially discovered herself to me. It would not have suited my purpose to have personally interrogated any of the bearers who were lying and sitting about the palankeen, as it would have rendered them suspicious, and would have been impertinent : after all it was only a woman,—what had I to do with women now ? And had I not made an inward resolution never to seek them as *bunij* ? nay, even to avoid parties in which there might be any ?

So I arose and took my way to our camp, firmly resolving that I would pursue my march the next morning ; for, thought I, she must be some lady of rank travelling to her lord, and Alla forbid that I should raise a hand against one so defenceless and unprotected ; and I thought of my own lovely Azima, and shuddered at the idea of her ever being placed within reach of other members of my profession, who might not be so scrupulous as I was.

But, Sahib, the resolves of men,—what are they ?—passing thoughts, which fain would excite the mind to good, only to be driven away by the wild and overpowering influences of passion. Despite of my resolve my mind was unquiet, and a thousand times fancy brought to my view the look she had cast on me, and whis-

pered that it was one of love. I could not shake it off, and sought in the conversation of my associates wherewith to drive her from my thoughts; but it was in vain; that passionate glance was before me, and the beauteous eyes which threw it seemed to ask for another, a nearer and more loving.

In this state I passed the day, now determining that I would resist the temptation which was gnawing at my heart, and now almost on the point of once more proceeding to the village and seeking out the unknown object of my disquietude; and I was irresolute, when towards evening I saw a slave girl making towards the camp, and I went to meet her, but not with the intention of speaking to her should she prove to be only a village girl. We met and I passed her, but I saw instantly that she was in search of some one, for she turned round hesitatingly and spoke to me.

“Forgive my boldness, Sahib,” said she, “but I am in search of some one, and your appearance tells me that it must be you.”

“Speak,” said I; “if I can aid you in anything, command me.”

“I know not,” she replied, “whether you are he or not; but tell me, did you sit at the

Tumbolees shop this morning for some time, smoking a hooka?"

"I did, my pretty maiden," said I; "and what of that? there is nothing so unusual in it as to attract attention."

"Ah, no!" said the girl archly; "but one saw you who wishes to see you again, and if you will now follow me I will guide you."

"And who may this person be?" I asked, "and what can be his or her business with a traveller?"

"Your first question I may not answer," said the girl; "and as to the second I am ignorant; but, by your soul, follow me, for the matter is urgent, and I have most express commands to bring you if I possibly can."

"I follow you," said I; "lead on."

"Then keep behind me at some distance," she said, "and when you see me enter the house, step boldly in after me, as if you were the master."

I followed her. But ah! Sahib, observe the power of destiny. I might have sat in my tent and denied myself to the girl, who, something told me, had come to seek me when I first saw her approach. I might, when I did advance to meet her, have passed on indifferently, and

even when she spoke to me I might have denied that I was the person she was sent after, or I might have refused to accompany her ; but destiny impelled me on, nay it led me by the nose after a slave-girl, to plunge into an adventure I fain would have avoided, and which my heart told me must end miserably. Sahib, there is no opposing Fate ; by the meanest ends it works out the greatest deeds, and we are its slaves, body and soul, blindly to do as its will works ! I say not Thugs only, but the whole human race. Is it not so ?

It appears to me, Ameer Ali, said I, that poor Destiny has the blame whenever your own wicked hearts fixed themselves on any object and you followed their suggestions.

Nay, but I would have avoided this, cried the Thug, and have I not told you so ? Alla knows I would not have entered into this matter ; but what could I do ? what were my weak resolves compared with his will ? and yet you will not believe me. Sahib, I do not tell a lie.

I dare say not, said I ; but the beautiful eyes were too much for you ; so go on with your story.

The Thug laughed. They were indeed, said

he, and accursed be the hour in which I saw them. But I will proceed.

The slave preceded me ; at some distance I followed her through the village and its bazars, and saw her enter the house before which I had sat in the morning. I too entered it, leaving my slippers at the door, and with the confident air of a man who goes into his own house. I had just passed the threshold when the slave stopped me.

“ Wait a moment,” said she ; “ I go to announce you ;” and she pulled aside the temporary screen and went in.

In a few moments she returned and bade me follow her. I obeyed her, and in the next instant was in the presence of the unknown, who was hidden from my sight by an envious sheet, which covered the whole of her person, and her face was turned away from me towards the wall.

“ Lady,” said I, “ your slave is come, and aught that he can do for one so lovely he will perform to the utmost of his power. Speak ! your commands are on my head and eyes.”

“ Byto,” she said in a low timid voice, “ I have somewhat to ask thee.”

I obeyed, and seated myself at a respectful distance from her on the carpet.

“You will think me bold and shameless, I fear, stranger,” said she, “for thus admitting you to my presence, nay even to my chamber; but, alas! I am a widow, and need the protection you are able perhaps to afford me. Which way do you travel?”

“Towards Nagpoor,” I replied; “I purpose leaving this miserable place early tomorrow, and I have come from Jubbulpoor.”

“From whence I have also come,” she said, “and I am going too to Nagpoor. Ah, my destiny is good which has sent me one who will protect the lonely and friendless widow!”

“It is strange, lady,” said I, “that we did not meet before, having come the same road.”

“No,” she replied, “it is not, since I was behind you. I heard you were before me, and I travelled fast to overtake you. We have now met, and as I must proceed the remainder of my journey alone, I implore you to allow me for the stage to join your party, with which, as I hear it is a large one, I shall be safe, and free from anxiety.”

“Your wish is granted, lady,” I said; “and any protection against the dangers of the way

which your poor slave can afford shall be cheerfully given. I will send a man early to awaken you, and promise that I will not leave the village without you."

She salamed to me gracefully, and in doing so the sheet, as if by accident, partly fell from her face, and disclosed again to my enraptured view the features I had beheld from a distance. Sahib, the shock was overpowering, and every nerve of my body tingled; only that a sense of decency restrained me, I had risen and thrown myself at her feet; but while a blush, as though of shame, mantled over her countenance, and she hastily withdrew the glance she had for an instant fixed on me, she replaced the sheet and again turned to the wall, bending her head towards the ground.

I thought it had been purely accidental, and the action at the time convinced me that she was really what she represented herself to be; and fearing that my longer presence would not be agreeable nor decent, I asked her if she had any further commands and for permission to depart.

"No," said she, "I have no further favour to beg, save to know the name of him to whom I am indebted for this act of kindness."

“ My name is Ameer Ali,” said I ; “ a poor syud of Hindostan.”

“ Your fluent speech assured me you were of that noble race ; I could not be mistaken,—’t is seldom one hears it. Fazil ! bring the pān and utr.”

She did so, and after taking the complimentary gift of dismissal, and anointing my breast and beard with the fragrant utr, I rose and made my obeisance. She saluted me in return, and again bade me not forget my promise. I assured her that she might depend upon me, and departed.

She must be what she says, thought I ; the very act of presenting pān and utr to me proves her rank ; no common person, no courtesan would have thought of it. I shall only have to bear a little jeering from Motee and Peer Khan, which I will resist and laugh away ; and this poor widow will reach Nagpoor in safety, without knowing that she has been in the hands of murderers. But I said nothing that night to any of them. In reply to their numerous questions as to the fortune I had met with in the village, and whether I had discovered the unknown, I only laughed, and said I believed it was some dancing-girl, for I knew the mention

of one would turn their minds from the thoughts of bunij, as it is forbidden to kill those persons by the laws of our profession ; and with my supposition they appeared satisfied.

Great, however, was their surprise when in the morning, after having delayed our departure longer than usual, I joined the party of the lady outside the village and they understood that we were to travel in company.

I was overpowered by jokes and witticisms from Peer Khan and Motee, who declared I was a sly dog thus to secure the lady all to myself ; and after protesting vehemently that I cared not about her, which only made them laugh the more, I became half angry.

“ Look you, my friends,” said I, “ this is a matter which has been in a manner forced upon me. Who the lady is I know not. She has begged of me to allow her to accompany us, as she supposes us to be travellers, and I have permitted it ; and whether she be old or young, ugly or beautiful, I am alike ignorant. We may hereafter find out her history, but, whoever she be, she has my promise of safe escort, and she is not bunij. You remember my resolution, and you will see I can keep it.”

“ Nay,” said Motee, “ be not angry ; if a

friend is not privileged to crack a joke now and then, who, in Bhugwan's name, is? And as for us, we are your servants, and bound to obey you by our oath; so you may have as many women in your train as you please, and not one shall be buniij."

So we pursued our road. Several times I could not resist riding up to the palankeen and making my noble horse curvet and prance beside it. The doors were at first closely shut, but one was gradually opened, and the same sparkling eyes threw me many a smiling and approving look, though the face was still hidden.

Alas! Sahib, those eyes did me great mischief,—I could not withstand them.

About noon, when we had rested from our fatigue, and my men were dispersed in various directions, scarcely any of them remaining in the camp, the slave-girl again came for me, and I followed her to her mistress.

We sat a long time in silence, and the lady was muffled up as I had before seen her. Despite of all my conflicting feelings, I own, Sahib, that in her presence my home was forgotten, and my burning desire was fixed upon the veiled being before me, of whose countenance I was even still ignorant.

She spake at last, but it was to the slave.

“Go,” said she, “and wait without, far out of hearing; I have that to say to this gentleman which must not enter even your ears, my Fazil.”

She departed, and I was alone with the other, and again there was a long, and to me a painful, silence.

“Meer Sahib,” she said at length, “what will you think of me?—what will you think of one who thus exposes herself to the gaze of a man and a stranger? But it matters not now; it has been done, and it is idle to think on the past. I am the widow of a nuwab, whose estate is near Agra; he died a short time ago at Nagpoor, on his way from Hyderabad, whither he had gone to see his brother, and I was left friendless, but not destitute. He had abundance of wealth with him, and I was thus enabled to live at Nagpoor, after sending news of his death to my estate, in comfort and affluence. The messengers I sent at length returned, and brought me the welcome news that there was no one to dispute my right to my husband’s property; and that my own family, which is as noble and as powerful as his was, had taken possession of the estate and held it on

my account; and they wrote to me to return as quickly as I could, and among the respectable men of the land choose a new husband, by whom I might have children to inherit the estate. I immediately set off on my return—ah! Ameer Ali, how can I tell the rest! my tongue from shame cleaves to the roof of my mouth, and my lips refuse utterance to the words which are at my heart.”

“Speak, lady,” said I, “by your soul, speak! I burn with impatience, and you have excited my curiosity now too powerfully for it to rest unsatisfied.”

“Then I must speak,” she said, “though I die of shame in the effort. I heard at the last village that you had arrived; I say you, because my faithful slave, who finds out everything, came shortly after your arrival and told me that she had seen the most beautiful cavalier her thoughts had ever pictured to her. She recounted your noble air, the beauty of your person, the grace with which you managed your fiery steed, and above all the sweet and amiable expression of your countenance. The account inflamed me. I had married an old man, who was jealous of my person, and who never allowed me to see any one but my poor

slave : but I had heard of manly beauty, and I longed for the time when his death should free me from this hated thralldom. Long I deliberated between the uncontrollable desire which possessed me and a sense of shame and womanly dignity ; and perhaps the latter might have conquered, but you came and sat opposite to the hovel in which I was resting ; my slave told me you were there, and I looked.—Alla ! Alla ! once my eyes had fixed themselves on you, I could not withdraw them ; and as the hole through which I gazed did not afford me a full view of your person, I partially opened the curtain and feasted my soul with your appearance. You went away, and I fell back on my carpet in despair. My slave at last restored me to consciousness, but I raved about you ; and fearful that my senses would leave me, she went and brought you. When you entered, how I longed to throw myself at your feet ! but shame prevailed, and, after a commonplace conversation, though my soul was on fire and my liver had turned into water, I suffered you to depart. I told my people that I must return to Nagpoor, as I had forgotten to redeem some jewels I had left in pledge, which were valuable ; and they believed

me.—Ameer Ali !” cried she, suddenly throwing off her veil and casting herself at my feet, while she buried her head in my lap, “Ameer Ali ! this is my tale of shame—I love you ; Alla only knows how my soul burns for you ! I will be your slave for ever ; whither you go, thither will I follow ; whoever you are, and whatever you are, I am yours, and yours only ; but I shall die without you. Alas ! why did you come to me ?”

CHAPTER XIV.

“ Yet she must die, or she’ll betray more men.”

OTHELLO.

AND where now were all my resolutions? By Alla, Sahib, I had forgotten all—home, wife, children—I thought not of them, but I drank deeply of love, wild, passionate, burning love, from her eyes, and I caressed her as though she were mine own. There we sat, and though guilt was in my soul, and it accused me of infidelity to my oft-repeated vows, I could not tear myself away from her, and I suffered her caresses in return, though they often struck to my heart like the blows of a sharp knife. Hours passed thus—I thought not of them; she seated at my feet, and I with my hands entwined in her long silken hair, and

gazing at her face of such loveliness, that never had my wildest dreams pictured anything like it. Zora was beautiful, Azima was even more so, but Shurfun surpassed them both in as great a degree as they excelled any of their sex I had ever seen. Fain would she have had me stay with her: fain would she, the temptress, have then and there separated me from my band, and led me with herself, whither she cared not, so I was with her and she with me. Wealth, she said, she had in abundance, and we could fly to some undiscoverable spot, where we should pass years of bliss together, and where she would, by communication with her family, procure such money from time to time as would enable us to live in affluence.

“Ameer Ali,” said she, “you are young, you are unknown, you have to fight your way to fame upon a bare pittance, and for this will you risk your precious life, when I offer you everything I possess, and swear that I am your slave? Ah, you will not, you cannot now leave me to perish in despair, and die of unrequited love! Speak, my soul, you will not leave me?”

Wretch, and perjured that I was, I swore to obey her wishes. Sahib, it was a sore temptation, and it overcame me.

At last I tore myself away from her, but not till I had sworn by her head and eyes to return the following day, when being more calm we might arrange our plans for the future.

I returned to my little tent, and there, in the agony of my soul, I rolled on the ground. I raved, I refused to eat, and was as one bereft of sense ; I spoke rudely to Peer Khan, who having been called by my attendant came to comfort me ; and I was almost on the point of driving my dagger to my heart to end a life, which though a splendid prospect was open to it, could never afterwards be aught than one of guilty misery. But the passion reached its height ; and as a thunder-cloud, which after a burst of internal commotion, after its deep peal has gone forth and it has ejected the lightning from its bosom, gradually pours its pent-up flood of waters to soothe and refresh the earth, so did mine eyes now rain tears, and they calmed me. I can now ask and take advice, thought I, and Peer Khan, who is fondly attached to me, will give it as he would to a brother.

I sent for him, and after apologizing for my rudeness, said he would find the cause of it in the relation I would give of the last few hours. I told him all, and awaited his answer. My

heart was relieved of a load of oppressive thought, and I was the better for it.

He pondered long ere he spoke; at last he said,—

“Meer Sahib, this is a difficult business indeed, and I hardly know what to advise; go to her tomorrow; be a man, and give not way to this boyish passion, which ill suits you; try to persuade her that you cannot do as she wishes; speak to her kindly, yet firmly, of her home, of her relatives, and of the guilt which must cleave to you both from the connexion she proposes. Tell her you have a wife and two children, and if she is a true woman she will be fired with jealousy, and will quarrel with you; do you then become irritated in your turn, and leave her to go her own way, and find some one who may not be so scrupulous, and may take advantage of her blind passions. And if all this fail, if no words of yours can drive these foolish ideas from her brain, we have only to make a long march in some unknown direction and at once be quit of her. I know the paths through the jungles, and by them, difficult as they are, we can easily reach Berar, where she will never again hear of us.”

I thanked him cordially for his advice; and

that part of it which related to Azima and my children struck forcibly on my heart. I was as yet, thanks to the protection of the Prophet, pure, and by his aid I would remain so. I determined I would urge my previous ties to her so forcibly, and I would depict my love for my wife in such colours, that she should at once reject me.

Full of these resolutions I once more obeyed her summons, sent me by her slave, and followed the girl, and as we had made a long march of twelve coss, it was now late in the day. I need not again tell you, Sahib, of all her love for me, which she now poured forth without check or reserve. She had fairly cast away all shame, and would hear of nothing I could represent as to the consequences of our connexion with her family. I had only now one resource, and as a man in alarm for his life fires the train of a mine, so did I, hurriedly and perhaps incoherently, mention my wife and children. The effect was, as Peer Khan had expected, instantaneous. She had been sitting at my feet, listening to my objections, and playfully reasoning with me against them; but, at these words, she suddenly started to her feet, and drew her noble figure up to its full height, while her eyes

flashed, as she smoothed back her flowing hair from her brow ; the veins of her forehead and neck swelled, and she was terrible to look on. I confess I quailed beneath the glances of scorn she cast on me.

“Man !” she cried at length, “ah, vile and faithless wretch, say, did I hear thee aright? Dare to say again that thou hast a wife and children ! What dirt hast thou eaten ?”

It was my time, and my good resolutions came to my aid ; I rose, and confronted her with a look as proud and unflinching as her own.

“Yes, Shurfun,” I said, “I have spoken the truth ; one as beautiful as thou art believes me faithful, and faithful I will remain to her ; long I reasoned with thee, and hadst thou not been carried away, and thy good feelings deadened, by an idle and sudden passion, thou hadst heard my words, and submitted to them, for the sake of thy family and hitherto untarnished honour. For my unfortunate share in this matter, may Alla forgive me ! Lady, it was thy maddening beauty which caused me to err ; but he has strengthened my heart, and again I implore thee to hear the words of friendship, and be thyself again.”

How can I tell you, Sahib, of her despair,

and the bitterness of her expressions, as she upbraided me with my deceit! I deserved them all, and not a word did I answer in return. I could not, and I dared not approach her, lest my heart should again yield to her blandishments, for I felt that a kind word or action would renew them, and cause her to forget the past; and it was pitiable to see her as she now sat on the ground, moaning and rocking herself to and fro, while at intervals she tore her hair and beat her breasts in her agony of spirit.

“Leave me!” she said at last. “Ah, Ameer Ali, thou hast broken a heart which could have loved thee for ever. I do not complain: it is the will of Alla that the only man I could ever have loved and honoured should deceive me, and I submit. Shurfun is not yet reduced so low that she could put up with the second place in any man’s heart, were he the monarch of Delhi itself. Go! the sight of you is painful to my soul; and may Alla forgive us both!”

I left her. I hastened to Peer Khan, and related the whole to him, and he was delighted.

“Now,” said he, “to make the matter sure, let us retrace our steps; it is not attended with any risk, for we can put up anywhere, and we

need not visit the village we before halted at; we have no hope of booty at Nagpoor, and if you like we can penetrate, as I said before, into Berar, and return by Khândésh, which was our original idea."

"I agree," said I; "this woman must be avoided at every risk. To save appearances she must go on to Nagpoor with her people, and we shall, by following your advice, avoid her altogether."

Accordingly the next morning, instead of pursuing the road we had taken, we turned back, and after a few hours' travel halted at a small village, a few coss distant from the one we had left. But little had I calculated on that woman's love and wild passions. Before the day was half spent, we saw her palankeen, attended by her men, advancing towards the village by the way we had come. What was to be done? I was for instant flight into the wild jungles by which we were surrounded, and where she would soon have lost all traces of us. But Peer Khan and Motee would not hear of it.

"It would be cowardly," said they; "there is no occasion thus to run before a woman; and why should we expose ourselves to dangers from

wild beasts, and the unhealthiness of the forest, on her account? And," added Motee, "if she follow us now, depend upon it it is not on your account, but because she is now determined to go to her home as quickly as possible."

"It may be so," said I; "whatever her plans may be they will not influence my determinations." Yet my mind misgave me that she would again follow us, and a short time proved that my suspicions were right. The slave came by stealth to my tent, disguised as a seller of milk, and I followed her, for I knew not why her mistress had sent for me, and why she now sought me after our last meeting.

I reached her presence, and again we were alone. I armed myself against her blandishments, and determined to oppose them with scorn, that she might again quarrel with me, and leave me for ever. I cannot relate to you, Sahib, all that passed between us; at one time she was all love, seeking to throw herself into my arms, and beseeching me to have pity on her, for she felt that her reputation was gone, in words that would have moved a heart of stone; at another, violently upbraiding me for my perfidy, and bidding me begone from her sight; yet, each time as I turned to depart, she would prevent

me, and again implore me to listen and agree to her proposals.

At last I could bear with her no longer. I was provoked with her importunities, and vexed at my own irresolute conduct. I bade her farewell, and was quitting the shed, where she had put up for the day, when she screamed to me to come back. I returned.

“Shurfun,” said I, “this is foolishness, and the conduct of children; why should we thus torment each other? You have heard my determination; and could you offer me the throne of Delhi, I might share it with you, but my heart would be hers who now possesses it, and you would live a torment to yourself and me. Jealousy even now possesses your heart, and what would not that passion become when you were in intercourse with the object you even now hate, and whom you could not separate from me?”

“I care not for your words,” said she; “I care not for the consequences; I have set my life and my fame on the issue of this,—and refuse me at your peril! As for your wife, I hate her not. Does not our law allow you four wives? Is it not so written in the blessed Koran? You cannot deny it. Even I, who am a woman, know it.

I would love Azima as a sister, and your children for your sake; and can you refuse wealth and a future life of distinction for them? Oh, man, are you bereft of sense? See, I speak to you calmly, and reason with you as I would were I your sister."

"I would to Alla thou wert my sister," I said; "I could love thee fondly as a sister, but never, never can I consent to this unhallowed and disgraceful union. Yes, Shurfun, disgraceful! disguise it with all thy flattering and sweet words, yet it is disgraceful. Do you dream for a moment that your proud family would receive as your husband, as the sharer of your property and wealth, a man unknown to them, one who has no family honours, no worldly distinction to boast of, and with whom you have picked up a casual acquaintance on the road? I tell you they would not. Go therefore, I beseech you, to your home, and in after years I will send my Azima to see you, and she shall pray for blessings on the noble woman who preserved her husband to her."

She sat silent for some time; but the fire was not quenched within her; it burst forth with increased violence, when I vainly thought that my temperate words had quenched it for ever.

Again she bade me go, but it was sullenly, and I left her.

I had not been an hour in my tent when the slave again came to me.—But perhaps, Sahib, you are tired of my minuteness in describing all my interviews with the Moghulanee?

No, said I, Ameer Ali: I suppose you have some object in it, therefore go on.

Well then, resumed the Thug, the slave came to me and I was alone.

“For the love of Alla,” said she, “Meer Sahib, do something for my poor mistress! Ever since you left her she has been in a kind of stupor, and has hardly spoken. She just now told me to go and purchase a quantity of opium for her; and when I refused, and fell at her feet, imploring her to recall her words, she spoke angrily to me, and said, if I did not go, she would go herself. So I have purchased it; but alas! I know its fatal use: and you alone can save her. Come quickly then, and speak a kind word to her; I have heard all that has passed, and you have behaved like a man of honour; but since you cannot persuade her to forget you and relinquish her intentions, at least for the time fall in with her humour, and agree to accompany her, on the promise that she will

not seek to see you on the road ; and say that when you reach her Jagheer you will have your marriage duly solemnized. Oh, do this for her sake ! You said you could love her as a sister, and this would be the conduct of a brother.”

“ Well,” said I, “ since the matter has come to this issue, that her life or death is in my hands, I consent ;” and I arose, and went with her.

Oh, with what joy the unhappy girl received me ! long she hung upon my bosom, and blessed me as her preserver, and kissed her slave when she related what she had said to me, and that I had agreed to her wishes. “ It is to save your precious life,” I cried, “ that I thus expose myself to the sneers and taunts of my friends and your own : think on the sacrifice I make in losing their love, and you will behave cautiously and decently on the road ; we need not meet—nay we must not, the temptation would be too strong for us both ; but I swear by your head and eyes I will not leave you, and you shall travel in our company.”

The slave had gone out, and she drew towards me. “ Beware,” said she, “ how you deceive me, for I know your secret, and if you are unfaithful I will expose it ; your life is in my hands, and you know it.”

“What secret?” cried I in alarm. “What can you mean?”

“I know that you are a Thug,” she said in a low and determined voice; “my slave has discovered you, and a thousand circumstances impress the belief that you are one upon my mind—your men, the way you encamp, the ceremonies my slave has seen your men performing, and the freedom with which you go forward or return at your pleasure. All these are conclusive, and I bid you beware! for nothing that you can say will persuade me to the contrary; you have even now the property of those you have killed in your camp—you cannot deny it, your looks confirm my words.”

I inwardly cursed the prying curiosity of the slave, and feared she had discovered us through one of our men with whom I had seen her conversing, and I determined to destroy him. But I had now fairly met my match, and though abashed for a moment, I replied to her:

“Then, Shurfun, since you have discovered us, I have no alternative, we must be united, I to save my life and the lives of my men, you to save your own. It is a fearful tie which binds us, but it cannot be broken.”

"I thought so," she said; "fool that I was not to have urged this before! I might have saved myself the agony which I have endured. Now go; I will hear of you from day to day, and it may be that we shall have an opportunity of conversing unobserved. Now I am sure of you, and my mind is at ease."

I left her, but my thoughts were in a whirl; she had discovered us, and by the rules of our profession I could not conceal it from my associates. Alla! Alla! to what would the communication I must make to them lead! Alas, I dreaded to think—yet it must be done.

A long time I deliberated with myself whether I should expose the truth to my associates, and fain would I not have done so; but the peril we were in was so imminent, and the lives of my fifty brave fellows were so completely at the mercy of a woman, that I could not overlook the strict rules of my profession. I knew that it could only lead to one alternative; but it was her fate, and it could not be avoided either by her or me.

As I expected, the fatal mandate went forth among us. My men were astonished and terrified at the information Shurfun possessed, and after a very brief consultation her fate was de-

terminated on. Sahib, you will think the worse of me for this, but what could be done? We could not leave her, she would have alarmed the villagers, and they would have pursued us. True, they could have done but little against us there; but they would have dogged us through the jungles, and at last have watched their opportunity and seized us. Our next care was to endeavour to find out the person from whom she had gained the information, and I mentioned the name of him with whom I had seen the slave conversing. Sahib, as I did it, his face bore the evidence of conscious guilt. He was a young man but little known to any of us, and was one of the Lughaees. He had accompanied Peer Khan in his last expedition, and had behaved well, so well as to induce him to allow his accompanying us; but by this act he had forfeited everything, and it was but too plain that he had been seduced by the wiles of that intriguing and artful slave.

Observing his altered looks, I at once accused him of treachery; and my accusation was reechoed by the voices of the band.

“He must die!” cried one and all; “we could never carry on our work with the knowledge that there was one treacherous person

with us; and it is the rule of our order too. Who ever spared a traitor?"

"Miserable wretch," said I to him, "why hast thou done this? Why hast thou been unfaithful to thine oath and the salt thou hast eaten? Didst thou not know the penalty? Hast thou not heard of hundreds of instances of treachery, and was ever one pardoned? Unhappy man! thou sayest nothing for thyself, and the sentence must be passed upon thee. Shame, that the wiles of a wretched slave should so far have led thee from thy duty, and exposed us all to peril!"

"Jemadar," said he rising, "I have sinned, and my hour is come. I ask not for mercy, for I know too well that it cannot be shown me; let me die by the hands of my own people, and I am content; and if my fate be a warning to them, I am satisfied. I was pure in my honour till I met that slave; she told me that you were to marry her mistress, and that you had told her who you were. I thought it true, and I conversed with her on the secrets of our band; I boasted to her of the deeds we had done, and she consented to be mine whenever we could meet with a fitting opportunity. Fool that I was, I was deceived; yet I offer this as no pal-

liation for my offence. Let therefore Goordut kill me; his is a sure hand, and he will not fail in his duty."

Goordut, the chief of our Lughaees, stepped forward. "Forgive me your death," said he to the fated wretch; "I have no enmity against you, but this is my duty, and I must do it."

"I forgive you," he replied. "Let your hand be firm; I shall offer no resistance, nor struggle; let my death-pain be short."

Goordut looked to me for the signal,—I gave it, and in another instant his victim had expiated his crime by death; he suffered passively, and Goordut's hand never trembled. The body was taken from among us and interred; and henceforward we had no treachery among us, nor did I ever meet with another instance, save one, and that was successful; you shall hear of it hereafter.

There but remained to allot to the different members of the band their separate places in the ensuing catastrophe; and this done, I felt that I had acted as a good Thug, and that a misplaced pity had not influenced me during the transactions of the day.

Strange was it, Sahib, that Shurfun, knowing who we were, should not, when she had

discovered it, at once have fled from us ! How she, a woman unused to and unacquainted with deeds of blood, could have borne to look on, nay more to have caressed and loved, one a murderer by profession, whose hand was raised against the whole human race, is more than I have ever been able to understand : I can only say it was her fate. She might, she ought to have avoided me ; in every principle of human conduct, her love for me was wicked and without shame, and a virtuous woman would have died before she had ever allowed it to possess her bosom. She might have cast me off when she said she would, and when her resolution was made to see me no more ; but her blind passion led her on into the net fate had spread for her, and she was as unable to avoid it, as you or I shall be to die, Sahib, when our hour comes.

We started in company with her the next morning. I was determined I would take no active part in her death, for I could not bear the thought of lifting my hand against one whose caresses I had allowed, and whose kisses were, I may say, still warm upon my lips. Motee and Peer Khan were allotted to her, and one of her attendants, was my share. But hers was a large party ; she had eight bearers, four se-

poys as her guards, and her slave rode on a pony, which was led by another servant. In all therefore they were fifteen individuals, and to make sure, thirty-five of my best men were to fall on them whenever we should meet a fitting place. I knew one, a wild spot it was, where the jungle was almost a forest, and where for miles on either side there was no human habitation; and I intended, for greater security, to lead the party by a path which I had discovered on our way down, and which led into the thickest part of the jungle, where I knew our deadly work would be sure of no interruption.

We reached the spot where the road diverged which I intended to take, and after much opposition on the part of her bearers, I succeeded in persuading them to follow me, by telling them, both that the road was a short one, and that there was a stream of water which crossed it, whereas on the main track there was none.

We gained the small rivulet, and I dismounted; my band surrounded their unsuspecting victims, and eagerly awaited the signal; but I wished to spare Shurfun the sight of the dead which she would be exposed to were she not the first to fall. I went to her palankeen, and

asked her to get out and partake of some refreshment I had brought with me ; she objected at first, as she would have to expose herself to the rash gaze of my men ; but I told her I had put up a cloth against a tree, that it was but a few steps off, and that veiled as she was, no one would see her, “ Your slave is there already,” said I ; “ so come, she is preparing our meal, the first we have ever eaten together.”

She stepped out cautiously, closely muffled in a sheet, so that she saw not those who were with me, the palankeen too concealed her person, and as she arose from her sitting posture, the roomal of Motee was around her, and she died instantly. Peer Khan held her hands, and the moment her breath was gone, he put the body into the palankeen and shut the door.

“ Now thus much is done,” said he, “ we must finish the rest, and that quickly ; they are all off their guard, and washing and drinking in the stream ; the men are at their posts. Bismilla ! give the jhirnee !”

I sought my place and gave it : my own share was quickly done, and the rest too ; but one or two were unskilful, and the shrieks of

the unfortunate but too guilty slave, among the rest, smote on my ear, and caused a pang to shoot to my heart at the thought that they had all died for the wretched caprice of a wicked woman. I could not bear to look at Shurfun,—the sight of her beautiful features would have overpowered me. I saw the Lughaees bear her away, but I followed not. Her palankeen was broken into pieces and buried with her.

Wretch that I am! cried I: ah, Ameer Ali, hadst thou no pity, no remorse, for one so young and so lovely?

I might have felt it, Sahib, but the fate of him who had died the day before was too fresh in my mind to allow me to show it: that might have been mine had I done so. Besides, can you deny that it was her fate? and, above all, had I not eaten the goor of the Tupounnee?

CHAPTER XVII.

SHOWING HOW AMEER ALI PLAYED A DEEP GAME FOR A
LARGE STAKE AND WON IT.

AFTER all had been completed, we travelled on until we reached a small and wretched village, some coss from the scene of our late adventure, where, after the customary sacrifice of goor, the considerable booty we had gained was produced and distributed. There soon arose a discussion as to our future proceedings. Some advised that we should return and go on to Nagpoor;—many indeed were for this, and I also inclined to it;—but Peer Khan gave better counsel, saying that, by our thus going backwards and forwards on the same road, we should certainly be suspected and perhaps attacked; and that to expose ourselves to this,

was not to be put in comparison with any chance of booty: he advised that we should make the best of our way towards Ellichpoor, avoiding that town, and keeping near the hills, until we got out of the jurisdiction of Sulabat Khan, who, if he heard of us, would assuredly suspect us of the death of the Nuwab Subzee Khan, who had been his guest, and whose fate was generally known over the country and attributed with justice to Thugs. After some further deliberation we all agreed to his plan, and the next day, leaving the high-road, we struck into a jungle-track and pursued it; and I was heartily glad, after some days of weary travel, when, arriving at the pass near the deserted temples of Mookhtagherry, we saw the wide valley of Berar stretched out before us, covered with the still green and luxuriant crops of jowaree.

For some days previous I had had shiverings and pains all over my body, and my mind was restless and ill at ease. In spite of my efforts to throw them off, horrible dreams haunted me at night, and the figure of Shurfun constantly presented itself to my fancy—now in the fullness of her beauty, and now changed and distorted as she must have been in death; while at

one time she was pouring out her tale of love to me, and at another upbraiding me with her fate. I had mentioned this to my companions, and many were the ceremonies which they performed over me to drive away the evil spirits which Motee declared had possessed me. But they were of no avail, and on the morning we reached the top of the pass I was so ill that I was obliged to be supported on my horse.

What was to be done? To go into Ellichpoor was to run into the tiger's mouth, and all seemed to be at a loss whither to proceed. However, on clearing the mouth of the glen through which the road ran, some of the men discerned a large village a very short way off, and came back with the welcome intelligence. I was sitting, or rather lying, at a miserable Goand hamlet on the road; and when I heard their news I remembered the village they spoke of, which I had passed the morning we left Ellichpoor with Subzee Khan, though I had forgotten its name. Thither, therefore, I begged they would carry me, and placing me upon my good horse, I was soon there, and made as comfortable as circumstances would admit of in the empty shop of a Bunnea.

But the fever raged within me; my whole frame was first convulsed with violent shiverings, which were succeeded by intense burnings. I remember no more of that day, nor indeed of many days after, for I lay insensible, and my spirit hovered between life and death.

The first words I recollect after that terrible time were from my faithful attendant.

“Shooke khoda!” he exclaimed; “at last he has opened his eyes!” and he ran and called Peer Khan and others to me.

“Where am I?” I faintly asked, for in the violence of the fever I had forgotten everything.

“Shooke khoda!” again exclaimed all; “he speaks at last!”

I again repeated my question, and it was answered by Peer Khan.

“Why, do you not remember?” said he; “here you are in the good village of Surrusgaum, within three coss of Ellichpoor; and now that you have spoken all will be right, you will soon recover; but we have been sadly anxious about you, for a worthy Mussulman, who is a Hukeem, said only yesterday that you would die, and bade us prepare for your burial: however, he was wrong, and, Inshalla! you

will soon see yourself at the head of your brave fellows again."

"Alas, Khan, I fear not," said I, "for I am weak and helpless, and your staying with me here only delays you to little purpose. Leave me to my fate, and if it is the will of Alla that I should recover, I will rejoin you at our home. I feel that I should be only a useless clog on your movements; for if I even get over this fever, I shall scarcely be able to sit on my horse for many a day to come."

"Forsake you, Meer Sahib—never!" exclaimed all who were sitting round me. "Who will bury you if you die? or who will tend you if you recover? What words are these? Are you not our brother, and more, our leader? and what would become of us if we left you?"

"Well, my friends," said I, deeply affected by their kindness, "since you prefer the bedside of a sick man to roaming in the wide and open country, even be it so; a few days will end your suspense, and either you will have to bury me here, or, if it be the pleasure of Alla, I shall once more lead you to new enterprises."

"But you must be silent," said Peer Khan, "for the Hukeem said so, and told us if you roused at all to send him word, as he had pre-

pared some medicine for you, which he would administer, and hoped it would hasten your recovery. I will go and tell him the good news."

In a short time the Khan returned, accompanied by an old and venerable person, who, after feeling my head and body, turned to the Khan and declared that my state was satisfactory. "But," said he, "as the fever proceeded from cold, which is still in his stomach, we must give him the medicine I spoke of: I have prepared it, and, being compounded of heating drugs, it will soon expel the cold, induce perspiration, and, Inshalla! tomorrow he will be a different being, though he will be weak for some time to come."

The draught was prepared, and, though nauseous in the extreme, I swallowed it, and by his directions covered myself with quilts and horse-cloths. I was quickly in a profuse perspiration; and when the Hukeem, who sat by my side all the time, thought I had been long enough under this treatment, he withdrew the coverings one by one, and taking my wet clothes from me I soon fell into a sound and refreshing sleep, from which I did not awake till the next morning's sun was shining on my eyelids.

I felt so much refreshed when I awoke that I arose, but my head swam round and I fell. I did not essay to repeat the exertion; but I was well; I felt that I had thrown off the disease, and I was thankful. Soon I had an inclination to eat, and after a slight meal of kiche-ree I was indeed a different being.

Two days more restored me to convalescence, and I heartily wished to be again on the road toward home; but travelling on horseback was out of the question, as I could only walk a few steps with assistance; so, as Peer Khan volunteered his services, I despatched him to Ellichpoor to endeavour to hire a palankeen or dooly with bearers, to carry me a few stages, or as long as I should find them necessary.

He returned with them, and the next day, having remunerated the good Hukeem, I gladly set out once again in company with my gallant fellows.

We took the best road to Boorhanpoor, that through the valley of Berar and close to the hills; and when we reached the old town of Julgaum, I felt myself so strong that I dismissed the palankeen and once more mounted my good horse.

A joyful and inspiring thing it is, Sahib, to

mount one's horse after a long and painful illness, and to feel once more the bounds of the generous animal under you, as though he too rejoiced at his master's recovery. He was, like myself, in high spirits, and I never enjoyed a ride so much as I did on that morning; the cool breeze fanned my thinned cheek as I rode along, now humouring my horse by allowing him to bound and caracol as he pleased, now exercising him on the plain, and again rejoining my band as they walked merrily along, apparently under the influence of the same joy as myself, and rejoicing to see me once more at their head.

We met with no adventure till we reached Boorhanpoor, where we arrived on the tenth day after leaving the village at which I had been so near dying: indeed we sought none. We found good quarters in one of the old serais in the town, and I was determined to stay there until we met with something to lead us on. Accordingly, men were daily sent into the different bazars; but seven days passed in idleness, and I began seriously to think that the death of Shurfun, which, though an inevitable deed, was against my faithful promises, had caused me to forfeit the protection of

our patroness; in other words, I feared my good fortune had deserted me, and for once I proposed a grand sacrifice to Davee and that the omens should be consulted, in order to afford us some clue to our future proceedings.

It was done, and the omens were good—"Propitious to a degree!" said Motee, who was our conductor in these matters; "we shall have good bunij soon, or these would never have been vouchsafed to us."

But another day passed, and still the Sothaees reported nothing.

The day after, however, about noon Motee came to me.

"You may know," said he, "that this place, from its wealth, is frequented by Rokurreas, or treasure-carriers, who bring money from Bombay, and take it into Malwa to purchase opium."

"I do," said I; "what of that? I heard as much from my father, who bade me return this way in the hope of picking up some of them."

"Then," said he, "I wish you to come with me, you and Peer Khan; you have both sharp eyes, and I am much mistaken if I have not discovered eight of them. I have killed others of their tribe before now, and I think I am not wrong when I say that these are some also."

“ Good,” I replied, “ I will come ;” and accompanied by Peer Khan and Motee we set forth to examine the men whom the latter had spoken of.

In an empty shop we found them. Wary as these people are, it was highly necessary that we should not excite their suspicion ; so we hurriedly passed them, concealing our faces in our handkerchiefs ; yet from the casual glance I threw at them I was certain, from their sturdy forms and the one camel they had with them, as well as from a kind of restless and suspicious bearing, that they were the men we were in search of. This was just the season too ; they would be bearing treasure to make advances to the poppy cultivators in Malwa, as the seed of the plant would not be sown for another month at least.

I was satisfied ; yet how to ensure their company I knew not, and many schemes passed through my mind before I could determine on anything : at length I formed one, as I sat with my companions on a flight of steps leading down to the river, and whither we often resorted to enjoy the fresh breezes and pure air from the noble river which flowed beneath us.

“ I have been thinking,” said I, “ what we are to do to secure these fellows ; you know they are proverbially wary.”

Both nodded assent.

“ Well,” I continued, “ what think you of the following scheme ? You and I, Peer Khan, will pretend to be travellers ; we will go now to our serai, throw dust and mud over our horses and dirty our clothes, and, taking two men and a pony heavily laden with us, we will go round the city, enter by the gate under the old palace, and pretending to be weary, halt close to them ; we shall easily be able to worm ourselves into their confidence, and will then accompany them. You, Motee, I will leave in charge of the band, and send you word what road we are to take. You must be guided by circumstances, and contrive to let the men overtake me by twos and threes ; some must go on before, so that we may come up to them ; and in this manner, though the band will be scattered, yet, Inshalla ! in a few marches we shall muster strong enough to do the work. We can keep up a communication with each other, so that when the business is done we can assemble, and then hurry forward to our home. But on no account must you be more than a stage

behind us; and you must contrive to reach our halting-place a short time after we have left it. Now say, my friends, will this plan do? or can you advise any other more practicable? if so, speak."

"It is excellent," cried both, "and had wisdom for its father. No time ought to be lost."

We returned to our serai, and towards the afternoon two as travel-stained and weary travellers in appearance as ever came off a long and fatiguing march were seen to enter the south gate of Boorhanpoor and traverse the bazars in search of shelter. These were myself and Peer Khan, attended by my good lad Junglee and two other Thugs. We passed and re-passed the shed, which was a large one, in which the Rokurreas were; and feigning to have been denied room everywhere that we had applied, I at last rode up to them, and addressed myself to the most respectable among them, a fine tall fellow, with huge whiskers and mustachios.

"Yaro!" said I, "you seem to be travellers as well as ourselves, and, for the love of Alla, allow us a little room to spread our carpets. Here you have seen us pass backwards and for-

wards for many times, and yet there is not a soul who will say to us, Dismount and refresh yourselves. Nay, we have been refused admittance into many empty places. May their owners' sisters be defiled !”

“ Go to the serai,” said the man ; “ there is room there, and you will be comfortable.”

“ Indeed,” said I, “ we have tried it already, and it is full ; some forty or fifty fellows were in it, who bade us begone in no measured terms ; and, in truth, we liked not their appearance, having some valuables about us. They looked very like thieves or Dacoos—did they not, brother ?” said I turning to Peer Khan.

“ Ay, indeed,” said he ; “ who knows, if we had put up among them, whether we should not have had our throats cut ? It was the mercy of Alla,” continued he, looking up devoutly, “ that the place was full, or, weary as we are, we should have been right glad to have rested ourselves anywhere, for indeed I can hardly sit on my horse.”

“ You see,” said I, “ how we are situated. Hindoos though you be, you will not refuse us. The evening is drawing in, and we have ridden all day ; a slight meal is all that we can hope to get, and then sleep will be welcome.”

“ Well,” said the fellow, “ it will be uncivil to turn you away, so alight ; and,” cried he to one of his companions, “ do you, Doorjun, and some others move the camel’s saddles and those bags nearer this way, and there will be room for these Bhula Admees.”

As they were being moved I heard the money chink.

We dismounted, and in a short time our horses were rubbed down, and a meal prepared, for we had fasted that day on purpose. When we had eaten it, behold us seated in conversation with the Rokurreas ; and having already possessed ourselves of their intended route, we agreed to accompany them for mutual security, and in short were on as good terms with them as if we had travelled hitherto together. Our appearance, our good horses, and arms assured them that we were soldiers, for I had told them we were in the service of Holkar, returning from Poonah, where we had been on a mission to the Peshwa, and bearing with us not only despatches, but some hoon-dees of large amount. In proof of this I pulled forth a bundle of papers from my inner vest, and touching my head and eyes with them, praised the munificence of Bajee Rao, and

extolled the friendly terms he was on with Holkar.

This was my master-stroke; the idea had occurred to me when I was at the serai, and I had hastily collected a bundle of waste-papers and accounts, made them up into a packet, directed it to Holkar, and sealed it with my own seal, which was as large as that of any prince in the country. By Alla! Sahib, they believed me to be what I represented, as surely as that they had heads on their shoulders, and forthwith began questioning me on the possibility of the Peshwa and Holkar uniting to overthrow the Feringhees; but I was mysteriously close in my replies, just hinting that it was possible, and turning off the conversation to the marks of favour which had been shown me by Bajee Rao, about which I told enough lies to have choked myself; and I pointed to my own noble horse as one of the Peshwa's gifts. They all declared that he was worthy of the giver and of the possessor; and, after agreeing on our stage for the morrow, which was distant eight coss, they went to sleep, with the exception of two, who sat guarding the treasure with drawn swords, and all believing that they were in company with an unknown great personage.

Before I lay down to rest I despatched Junglee with the information to Motee. I spoke to him openly in Ramasee, and he set off on his errand.

"That is a queer language," said the Jemadar of the Rokurreas; "what is it?"

"'Tis Teloogoo," said I carelessly. "I picked the lad up at Hyderabad two years ago for a small sum, and he is my slave; he understands our Hindoo, but does not speak it."

Perhaps it was unwise to have done it, but I spoke in so careless a manner that they concluded I had sent him out on some casual errand. Indeed, I told him to buy some tobacco and pān on his way back, and as the serai was not far from where we were, the time occupied in his going to it would not exceed that of an ordinary errand.

He returned with the pān and tobacco, and told me they were ready, but that the majority would remain the next day, and that seven of the best, under Goordut, were then about to depart; the rest, leaving one of their number as a scout in the village we were to halt at, would push on as far as they could beyond.

I was satisfied, and so sure did I feel of the success of this adventure that I would have wagered all I possessed that I killed the Rokurreas in three days. We started the next morning, and for two days saw none of our men; however Peer Khan augured well from it, saying the fellows were up to their work, and would appear in good time, and that if they came too soon our companions would take the alarm and be off.

On the fourth day one of our companions appeared; we overtook him on the road, and as I lagged purposely in the rear, I learned from him that Goordut and his remaining men were in advance of us one march, and that some would join us that day and the rest the next.

This was as it should be. Four men joined us at the village we encamped at; and as we were now nine to eight, I began to think on the probability of putting them to death by violence—I mean, attacking them with our swords on any opportunity which might offer. But it was dangerous, as they were individually stouter men than we were, good hands at their weapons, and as watchful as cats.

The second day Goordut and his party joined us, but it was as much as I could do to per-

suade the Rokurreas to allow them to travel in our company. They declared it was directly against their rules, that we must be aware of this, and that, if it was known by their employers that they even admitted one traveller into their society on the road, they would lose their reputation and means of subsistence.

“But you,” continued the Jemadar, whose name was Bheem Singh, “you are respectable persons, who, for the honour of the government you serve, would assist us against thieves or robbers, and we travel in your company through these territories of Sindia as safely as though we had a rissala of cavalry to guard us. However, for our sakes, let not the tales of wayfarers make any impression on your mind; depend upon a Rokurrea’s experience, they are not to be trusted: and even when by yourself always avoid associating with any one; no good can come of it, and much harm may ensue.”

I promised to take his advice, and as I saw clearly that they would not admit any more of our band into their company, and that a quarrel and separation from them would inevitably be the consequence if I persisted in forcing any more upon them, I determined to finish the matter as I best could with the

twelve men I had. Junglee was worth but little, at least I counted not upon him, as he was a mere stripling; but the rest were the very best of my band, all noted Bhuttotes, and fellows who had good swords, and knew right well how to use them.

In the day, therefore, we had a consultation; we met in a field of jowaree, which concealed us, and there we discussed the affair. Peer Khan proposed to send one of the men back for Motee and the rest, to tell them to pass us in the night without stopping, and to allow us to overtake them early in the morning; and as soon as the two parties were mingled together, in passing each other, that I should give the jhirnee.

The plan was very feasible, and the advice was good, as it placed the issue beyond a doubt; I inclined to it myself. Still there was no honour to be gained by it; it would be large odds against a few, and this I did not like, as I had a choice in the matter. At last I said, after musing some time, and listening to Peer Khan as he discussed the measure, "No, no, Peer Khan; we are all of us young, and fame is dear to us. If we kill these people in the old way, and the booty is large, we shall no doubt get

praise; but think, man, on the honour to be gained, the good name! If we risk ourselves against these fellows, and are victorious, will not every Thug in the land cry Shabash! and Wah, Wah! and is not this worth an effort? I tell you a good name is better than riches; and if it is our time to die, we cannot avoid it by calling up Motee and his people. They are after all only the refuse; and are we not the picked men of the band, and those on whom the matter would fall, even were the whole now present? Say, therefore, will ye risk your lives against these fellows, and fall on them tomorrow morning?"

Sahib, they did not hesitate; one and all pledged themselves to follow me, and die with me should it be their fate.

"Then see your swords are loose in their scabbards," said I, "and let each of you plant himself within striking distance of his enemy, on his left hand. Peer Khan and myself are mounted, and we cannot fail. I feel assured that there will be no danger, and that we shall succeed."

We dispersed, and rejoined our associates. The evening was spent in singing and playing on the sitar, on which two of the Rokurreas and some of my men were adepts; and we retired

to rest at a late hour, fully prepared to do our work well and bravely on the morrow.

And the morrow came, and the sun rose in splendour; we set out soon afterwards, for the Rokurreas would not travel before it had risen, for fear of surprise from thieves or Dacoos, who generally fall on travellers in the dark.

Somewhat to my mortification, two of the Rokurreas mounted the camel they had with them, saying their feet were cracked and sore and they could not walk. This disconcerted me for a moment, for I thought they had suspected us, and I knew that most, if not all, the treasure was laden upon it. But I affected no surprise, and was determined, if they showed the least symptoms of flight, to wound the camel, and thereby prevent its getting away from us by the great speed I knew it possessed, for they had put it to its utmost the day before, to show me that it could outstrip a horse.

We travelled along until mid-day, and the fatigue and heat made us glad to dismount at a stream which crossed the road. I thought it would be a good opportunity to fall on them, but I was disappointed; they all kept together, and I was then satisfied that they half suspected our intentions; but I could not delay the attack

long, and was determined to make it under any circumstances, for the rapid rate at which the Rokurreas travelled was exhausting my men, who had much ado to keep up with them.

By the merest good luck, about a coss after we left the Nulla, we entered on a rough and stony track, which diminished the speed of the camel, whose feet were hurt by the stones, and he picked his way cautiously, though I saw the men on his back used every exertion to urge him on. This slowness enabled my men to take their places, and we continued to proceed a short distance, but ready at any moment for the onset. I wished to get as near the camel as I could, in order to prevent its escape; but the road became worse, our pace still slower, and I was satisfied it could not be urged quicker. We were at this time all in a group, and I saw that the time had come. How my heart beat! not with fear, Sahib, but with excitement—excitement like that of a gambler who has risked his all on a stake, and who, with clenched hands, set teeth, and half-drawn breath, watches the turn of the cowrees, which is either to ruin him or better his fortunes.

Peer Khan threw a glance towards me: one of the Rokurreas was trudging along at his

horse's shoulders, another was at the same place near mine ; and the fellows on the camel, with their backs turned towards us, were singing merrily one of the wild lays of the Rajpoots, in which from time to time they were joined in chorus by those on foot, and by some of my men who knew the words. Junglee was close behind the camel leading my pony, and the others in the rear, but all in their places. I cast but one look behind to see that they were so, and being satisfied, I gave the jhirnee—"Junglee pān lao !" I cried with a loud voice.

The swords of my party flashed brightly from their scabbards, and in an instant were buried deeply in the bodies of their victims and crimsoned with gore. As for myself, I had cloven the scull of the fellow beneath me, and my sword sticking in the wound escaped from my hand as he fell ; I threw myself from my horse to recover it, and only then saw the camel prostrate on the ground, moaning terribly ; the men upon it had fallen with it, but both had gained their legs: one had thrown himself upon Junglee, and the poor lad waged an unequal combat with him ; the other rushed on me with his sword uplifted. Sahib, I thought my end was come, but I had time to disengage my shield

from my back, and held it before me in defence, while I tugged in very desperation at my weapon.

Praise be to Alla! it yielded to my great exertion, and we were on equal terms. I have before told you of my skill as a swordsman, but I had met my match in the Rokurrea: he, though all his men were lying around him save one,—who having sorely wounded my poor attendant, was now closely pressed by Peer Khan and another,—was as cool and wary as myself. We fought well, and for a long time the contest was equal; we were both out of breath, and our shields hacked with the repeated blows we had each caught on them; at last, as my foot slipped on a stone, he made a stroke at my head: the blow was weak from his exhausted state, or it would have ended me: it cut through my turban, and slightly wounded my head.

I did not fall, though I was somewhat stunned by the stroke; he might have taken advantage of the moment, yet he neglected it. Maddened by the thought of defeat, I rushed on him, and by the violence of my attack forced him backward: at last, he too slipped as he retreated, and lost his balance; he

raised his sword wildly in the air to recover himself, but I did not lose my opportunity as he had done; my blow descended with its full force, increased by a sudden leap I made towards him, and he fell to the earth cloven through the neck and shoulder,—he was dead almost ere he fell. A moment I gazed on the features of the brave Rajpoot, and then sought my poor lad, from whom the life-blood was fast ebbing away; his wound was also in the neck, and the blood rushing into his throat was choking him.

I tried to staunch it with my waistband, but ineffectually; it relieved him for a moment, and he asked for water. A leathern bag containing some had been tied to the camel by one of the men, and I put the mouth of it to his lips; he drank a little, and sat up, supported by Goordut.

“I am killed,” said he, “Jemadar—I die—my own blood chokes me: I cannot recover. Do not leave my body to be eaten by the beasts, but bury it. That fellow,” continued he after a short interval, and pointing to one of the dead, “that fellow’s sword killed me. I cut the hind sinews of the camel’s leg, and it fell; I thought they would both be stunned, but he got up and attacked me, and I was no match

for him. All the rest of you were engaged, or you would have helped me. But it was my fate to die, and I felt it yesterday, the bitterness of death then passed over me, but now I am content: the pain will soon be over."

Here he sunk insensible, and we stood around him weeping, for he was an affectionate lad, and we all loved him as a brother. But he recovered again slightly, though the rattle was in his throat, and the blood hardly allowed him to speak.

"My mother!" he said faintly, "Jemadar, my mother! You know her, and my little sister. They will starve now;—but you will protect them for poor Junglee's sake?" And he strove to bend his head on my hand, as though to supplicate my assistance for them.

"Fear not," said I, "they shall be well cared for, and while Ameer Ali lives they shall know no want." But I could hardly speak for weeping, for I knew the old woman, and many were the prayers she made for his safe return as she confided him to my care. Alas! how should we be able to tell her his fate!

The poor boy was satisfied with my words; he would fain have replied to them, and his lips moved; but a torrent of blood checked his utter-

ance, and raising his dull and glazed eyes to mine, he bowed his head on my hand, and died in the effort. "Now," said I to the assembled Thugs, "I here swear to one thing, and ye are none of mine unless ye agree to it. I swear that whatever share would have come to this poor lad, it shall be doubled for his mother: as yet we know not what it is, but, whatever it be, it shall be doubled."

"We agree," cried all; "nay, every man of us will add to it what he can; had Junglee not hamstrung the camel, which none of us thought of doing, it might, nay would, have escaped: for we saw its speed yesterday, and the two good Rajpoots who were on it would have carried it off."

"Ye are my own brothers for this good promise," I said; "and now some of you dig a grave for the poor lad. We must unload that beast, and strip the bodies. For myself, I am in some pain, and will wash my head and tie up the cut: so set about your work quickly."

The camel still lay groaning; they tried to raise it up, but in vain; the stroke had divided the sinew above the hock, and it could not raise itself; so one of the men cut its throat, and ended its pain. The bags of treasure were transferred

to my pony and Peer Khan's horse and mine, and every man also filled his waistband, so that we were enabled to carry it all off. We took the swords of the Rajpoots; but everything else, and their bodies, were dragged into the jungle to some distance, and hastily covered with earth and stones. The bloody earth on the scene of the conflict was collected and thrown away, and in a very short time nothing remained to mark the spot but the carcass of the camel, which we could not dispose of; and leaving the usual marks for the guidance of Motee and his party, we continued our march on the main road.

Ah, how great was our joy when, before we reached the stage we were to encamp at, and as we sat at the edge of a stream washing ourselves, we saw, on the brow of a rising-ground we had just passed, our party coming up! They ran towards us in breathless anxiety and hope.

Motee was first, and he threw himself into my arms. "We hastened on," he said, "from the last stage, hoping to overtake you in time; and when we saw the dead camel, how great was our suspense till we could find you! We saw the traces of the conflict, and some blood

which had escaped your notice,—which I have removed,—and that added to our anxiety; but Davee be praised! we have found you at last, and you are all safe. Is it not so?”

“Not quite,” I said; “we have lost poor Junglee, who was killed in the fight: and I am wounded; but ’t is only a slight cut, and a few days will heal it.”

Some of the treasure was instantly distributed to the other ponies; and encamping outside the village, when we reached it, after the accustomed sacrifice, I had my small tent pitched, and all the treasure was conveyed to it. One by one the bags were opened, and glorious indeed was the booty—well worth the risk we had encountered! It consisted of dollars, gold mohurs, and rupees, to the value of sixty thousand rupees in all; and there were also six strings of large pearls in a small box, sewn up in wax-cloth, which could not be worth less than ten thousand more. I need not describe our joy: we had comfort, nay affluence, before us for years, and every one sat and gazed at the heap of treasure in silent thankfulness. Finally, it was all collected and put into bags, which I sealed with my own seal.

We now hurried to our home, for we sought no adventure, nor needed any : only two unfortunate wretches, who insisted on joining us, were killed, and in less than a month we were within three marches of our village. I despatched a man in advance to give notice of our approach ; and, Alla ! how my heart beat with love and fond anxiety to see Azima, and to press once more my children to my heart, after all the perils I had encountered ! how intense was my anxiety to reach my own threshold, when I saw the well-known grove appear in view, the spot from whence I had departed so full of hope, and the walls and white musjid of the village peeping from amidst the trees by which they were surrounded ! I urged my horse into a gallop, and I saw my father and Moedeen approaching to meet me, to give me the *istukbal*, the welcome of return ; but, as I neared them, they hung their heads, and advanced with slow and mournful steps. A sudden pang shot through my heart. I threw myself from my horse, and ran towards them. My father was weeping.

“ Speak, for the sake of Alla ! ” I cried.
“ What can this be ? Oh say the worst at once,

and tell me—is Azima dead? this suspense will kill me.”

A few words only the old man spake, as he told me that my child, my beautiful boy, was dead!

And Ameer Ali wept.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Lear.—Dost thou know me, fellow?”

Kent.—No, sir; but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.”

LEAR. *Act I. Sc. 4.*

ALTHOUGH the mind would ordinarily reject sympathy with the joys or sorrows of a murderer like Ameer Ali, one so deeply stained with crime of the most revolting nature, yet for the moment I was moved to see, that after the lapse of nearly twenty years by his account, the simple mention of the death of his favourite child could so much affect him, even to tears, and they were genuine. I leave others to speculate on the peculiar frame of the Thug's mind, how this one feeling of tenderness escaped being choked by the rank guilt that had sprung up around it, and will pursue my relation of his adventures.

Sahib, he said, why should I now trouble

you with an account of my miserable meeting with my loved Azima? You can picture it to yourself. Our souls had been bound up in that boy, and it was long ere we could bring ourselves to submit to the blow which the hand of Alla had inflicted. But the poignancy of the grief passed away, and our girl, growing up in beauty, occupied our thoughts and engaged our care and attention.

Some time after we returned, my father one day came to me, and with concern on his countenance declared there was a rumour that we were suspected, and that he thought our village was no longer a safe abode for us. We could risk nothing; there might or might not be truth in the report, but it was our duty to secure a safe asylum: and accordingly he and I set out to make a tour of the different states as yet independent of the English, and to find out whether any of their rulers would allow us a residence on payment of a fixed tribute, such as our fraternity had used to pay to Sindia's government when our village belonged to that prince. We accordingly departed, and after visiting many rulers in Bundelkund, (for we were averse to going further from our home,) we were received by the Rajah of Jhalone, and

were introduced to him by Ganesha Jemadar, who was under his protection, and who made him handsome returns from the booty he collected for his friendly conduct.

Our negotiation was a long one: the Rajah was fearful for some time of the consequences of harbouring us, or pretended to be so in order to enhance the favour he was conferring; but we distributed bribes plentifully to his attendants and confidential servants, and at last succeeded in our object. We were to pay a tax of three hundred rupees a year to his government, present him with anything rare or valuable we might pick up, and, to preserve appearances, my father agreed to farm three villages situated a short distance from his capital. The whole concluded by our presenting to him one of the strings of pearls we had taken on the last expedition, my own beautiful sword, and other articles, valued at nearly five thousand rupees. When we were thus mutually satisfied, my father and some of the men remained behind, while I and the rest returned to our village, to bring away our families.

I confess I left our home with regret; many, many happy days had been passed there, and we were beloved by the villagers, to whom we

had endeared ourselves by our inoffensive conduct. We were now to seek a new country, and form new ties and connexions—a disagreeable matter under any circumstances. But my father's wisdom had saved us. The information the English officers had obtained—Alla only knows how—was correct. In a very few months after we were settled in our new abode, we heard that the whole Purgunna of Murnae had been attacked, village by village. Many of the best and bravest of the Thugs had died defending their homes; the survivors had fled, routed and utterly disorganized, and had taken refuge with those who had made previous settlements as we had done.

For my own part, so long as my money lasted I was in no humour to expose myself to fresh risks. I had too attained the highest rank possible among Thugs, for I had been declared a Soobehdar immediately upon my return from the last expedition; and I was content to enjoy my ease, and assist my father in the management of the villages which had been confided to us, and by which we realized a comfortable income. For the time, therefore, Thuggee was abandoned; and though often urged by Ganesha, who had a wild and restless spirit, to join him

in an expedition, we refrained from doing so, and lived peacefully and respectably.

There was something about Ganesha which to me was mysterious, and the instant I saw him at the court of the Rajah, a thought flashed into my mind that I had met him before under painful circumstances. In spite of all my endeavours I could hardly ever shake it off sufficiently to be on any terms of cordiality with him; and I viewed with suspicion and distrust his intimacy with my father, and the evident effect his counsels had upon him. In person Ganesha was tall and strong, but his face was more forbidding than any one I had ever before seen, and there was a savage ferocity about his manner which disgusted me. But let him pass at present; he has now little to do with my story, hereafter I shall be obliged to bring him prominently and disagreeably before you.

Nearly three years passed quietly, and unmarked by anything which I can recall to my memory. I had no more children, and my daughter was growing up a model of beauty and grace. I was happy, and never should have dreamed of leaving home, had it not been for the bad faith of the Rajah, and one unfortunate season of drought; by the former we

were obliged to pay five thousand rupees, which he demanded under threats of discovering us ; and by the latter we lost considerably in the villages we farmed, which were now seven in number, and for which he obliged us to pay the full amount of revenue. These sums seriously diminished our resources ; and I began to look about me for men, to compose a band to go in search of more plunder. But they were not easily collected, for my own men had dispersed to distant parts of the country, and could not be brought together save at great expense and sacrifice of time.

Just at this period it was rumoured through the country that Cheetoo and other Pindharee chiefs of note would assemble their forces after the rains, at the festival of the Dussera, and had planned an expedition of greater magnitude than any ever before undertaken ; an expedition which was sure to enrich all its members, and strike terror into the English government. The idea suited me exactly ; I was a soldier by inclination, if not by profession ; and I thought, if I could join any of the durras with a few choice men, well mounted, we might make as good a thing of it as if we went out on an expedition of our own. The latter scheme, more-

over, promised no success, for the roads would be infested by straggling parties of Pindharees, who were well known to spare neither travellers nor Thugs; they looked on the last indeed with great enmity.

Accordingly I set to work to make my preparations. Peer Khan and Motee still remained near us, and when I disclosed my plans to them, they entered into them with great readiness and alacrity. They had enough money to mount themselves well, and after a short absence returned fully equipped for the journey. I had told them to look out for a few really fine fellows to accompany us, whom they brought; but our united means would not allow of our purchasing horses for them, and on foot they would be of no use. In debating on our dilemma, an idea occurred to me that the Rajah would perhaps lend or sell the horses, on the promise of after and double payment. I had heard of such things, and I determined to try what could be done.

To my great joy the Rajah consented, and with less difficulty than I had anticipated, for I had become a great favourite with him. I was allowed to take five horses from his stables, which were valued at three hundred rupees each, with

their saddles and accoutrements, and this sum was to be doubled in case we returned successful. The Rajah indeed thanked me for the hint I had given him, and many others obtained horses on the same terms, on giving security for the performance of the conditions under which they took them.

My final arrangements were soon completed. We were all armed and accoutred in the handsomest manner we could afford; and a better-mounted or more gallant-looking little party never set out in quest of adventure than I and my seven associates. Before we started we consulted the omens, which were favourable, and we performed all the ceremonies of departure exactly as if we had been going on an expedition of Thuggee.

In due time we arrived at Nemawur, the residence of Cheetoo. Here were collected men from every part of Hindostan, as various in their tribes as they were in their dresses, arms, and accoutrements. The country round Nemawur was full of them, and the town itself appeared a moving mass of human beings, attracted by the hope of active service, and above all of plunder. We lost no time in presenting ourselves at the durbar of the chief, and were

graciously received by him. I opened our conference in the usual manner, by presenting the hilt of my sword as a nuzzur; and having dressed myself in my richest clothes, I was instantly welcomed as if I had been a Sirdar of rank, and had the command, not of seven men, but of as many hundreds.

Cheetoo was a fine-looking man, and a gallant leader. He ought to have died on the field of battle, instead of in the miserable manner he did. No man that ever led a Lubhur was juster in the division of plunder; no one was ever more attentive to the wants and complaints of those under him than was Cheetoo Pindharee. It was this which gained him so many followers, while his personal activity and hardihood stimulated his soldiers to exertion and emulation. Nothing could tire him; often have I seen him after a long and weary march, when it was as much as most of us could do to sit on our horses, dash out to the front and exercise his noble steed, which bore him gallantly, as though he were only returning from a morning's ride of a few miles.

Cheetoo was, as I said, struck with my appearance, as I introduced myself as a poor Syud

of Jhalone, desirous of serving under him in his ensuing campaign.

“Oh,” said he, “from Jhalone! you have travelled far, my friend; but nevertheless you are welcome, as every brave cavalier is who brings a good horse and a willing heart to the service of Cheetoo. You know my conditions of service; I give no pay, but as much plunder as your own activity can procure: the people will tell you what my share of it is; and I look to your honesty, for your face belies you if you are a rogue.”

“I know the conditions,” said I, “and will accept them; but I have brought a few friends with me who are desirous of sharing my fortunes, and, if it be the pleasure of the Huzoor, I will bring them.”

“Surely,” he replied; “but now I am engaged: meet me with your men at the place of assembly in the evening, and I will see them and your horses, for the station I shall allot you in the durra depends on their fitness.”

I made my obeisance and retired. I had made the acquaintance of one of Cheetoo's Sirdars, a man by name Ghuffoor Khan, a perfect savage in appearance and deportment, a

fellow who had Pindharee written on his face, and had served with much distinction in the durras of Dost Mahomed and Kureem Khan. He had introduced me too Cheetoo, and now, as he accompanied me from the durbar, he gave me instructions how I was to proceed.

“ You will meet us,” he said, “ on the plain beyond the town, and see that all your horses look well, that your men are well dressed and armed, and I will venture to declare that you are all placed in my division, which has the honour of leading, and is the first for fighting and for plunder. I shall be glad to have you, and I will try whether I cannot get you the command of a hundred or two of my own risala. We want leaders, and from your appearance I judge that you will do justice to my patronage.”

“ It is the very thing I have ever wished for,” I said ; “ and if you will but favour me, I will do my utmost to please you. It is true I have as yet seen no service ; but that is easily learned when the heart is willing.”

We separated, and I hastened to my men to get them in readiness for the inspection of our new chief. Our horses had now rested from the fatigue of the journey, and were in high

condition: our arms were cleaned and sharpened. We provided ourselves with the long spear which is peculiar to the Pindharees, and of which thousands were on sale; and at the appointed hour I led my little band to the place, where some hundred horsemen were already assembled. I had dressed myself in the armour of Subzee Khan, which was a magnificent suit; and my noble horse, as he bounded and caracolled with me, seemed proud of his rider, and glad that he had at last got into a scene suited to his fiery spirit. Peer Khan and Motee were also striking figures, and nearly as well mounted as I was; and the rest were as good, if not better, than the majority of those who were now assembled.

“Keep all together,” said I to them; “do not straggle, or our party will appear more insignificant than it really is. When you see the chief coming, watch my movements and follow me.”

Long before sunset Cheetoo issued from the town, accompanied by as gallant a company as could well be imagined. The leaders of the different durras were all around him, each surpassing the other in the richness and martial air of his dress, his arms, and the trappings

of his horse. Before him, making his horse leap and bound in a wonderful manner, rode Ghuffoor Khan, clad in chain-armour, which glittered in the red rays of the setting sun. No one equalled him in appearance, though many were noble-looking cavaliers; and no one appeared to manage his steed with the ease and grace that he did.

“That is the man!” I cried with enthusiasm to Peer Khan; “that is the man we are to serve under; is he not a gallant fellow? Now follow me.” And I gave my impatient horse the rein, and dashing onwards was in an instant at the side of Cheetoo, accompanied by my men. I dropped my spear to the ground, as I threw my horse back on his haunches close to him, and making an obeisance down to my saddle-bow, said that I had brought my men as he had directed, and awaited his orders.

Cheetoo checked his horse, and for a moment surveyed me with delight.

“You are a fine young fellow,” he said at length, “and your men are excellently mounted. I would there were as many hundreds of you as you have companions. However, something may be done. What say you, Ghuffoor Khan, will

the Meer Sahib serve with you? and have you a few hundred men to put under him?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" cried the Khan, "'tis the very thing your servant would have proposed. I liked the Meer Sahib from the moment I saw him, and now that he is properly dressed, by Alla! he is a very Roostum, and the only fit companion for himself (forgive my insolence) that Ghuffoor Khan sees."

"Then be it so," said Cheetoo; "take him with you, and see that you treat him kindly."

"Come," cried the Khan to me, "come then, Meer Sahib, take a tilting-spear from one of those fellows; here is a rare piece of ground, and I must see whether you are master of your weapon."

"I fear not," said I; "I know little about the spear. On foot and with the sword I should not fear the best man of the army; nevertheless, to please you, I will try."

I took the spear, a long light bamboo, with a large stuffed ball of cotton at the end of it, from which depended a number of small streamers of red cloth, and following Ghuffoor Khan, dashed forwards into the plain.

We pursued each other alternately, now advancing to the attack, now retreating, amidst

the plaudits of the assembled horsemen, who looked on with curiosity to see how an utter stranger would behave against the most accomplished cavalier of the army. For a long time neither of us had any advantage over the other ; our horses were admirably trained, and neither allowed the other to approach within reach of the spear-thrust. This was the great nicety of the tilt, and cries of "Shabash ! Shabash !" resounded at every baffling turn or successful escape from a meditated blow. At last the Khan touched me ; it was but a graze, which I received on my arm, having delayed for an instant to turn my horse, and he cried out that he had won.

"I own it," said I, as our horses stood panting for breath, "for I am, as you know, a novice at the use of the weapon ; yet if you will give me another trial, I will again cross spears with you, and see if I have not better luck."

"Good," cried he, laughing ; "but look out, for I warn you I shall not be merciful ; a sharp blow on the ribs of a young hand teaches him his vulnerable point, and causes him to be careful ever after."

"Come on," cried I ; "if I can I will return the compliment."

We again took a large circle, and at a good canter approached each other till we were nearly within spear's length. The Khan was as good as his word, and made several desperate lunges at me. I avoided them, however, by the quickness of my horse, and I plainly saw that he could by no endeavour approach near enough to me to strike a decisive blow. His horse too, being fatter, was more blown than my own; and, after allowing him to weary it still more for some time in a vain pursuit of me, I suddenly changed my position and became his assailant. I believe I was more cool and wary than he was, for he appeared vexed that a stranger should be on such equal terms with him at his favourite exercise; he did not parry my lunges with the same precision as in the first encounter, when, notwithstanding all my efforts to touch him, he avoided and laughed at me. Still I had not touched him; and growing weary of my close pursuit, he endeavoured to turn again and become the assailant; but whether his horse was slow in wheeling round, or whether I was too near to allow of his avoiding the blow, I know not; but as he endeavoured to cross behind me, I wheeled my horse suddenly, struck my heels

into his sides, and as he gave his accustomed bound of some yards, struck my spear full on the broad chest of the Khan, who was somewhat stunned by the blow. A loud shout from those around us proclaimed my victory, and the Khan himself, though abashed at his defeat, was one of the loudest in my praises to the chief himself.

“By Alla!” said he, “thou art no stranger at this work, Meer Sahib; thou hast played me a trick.”

“I swear by your beard and the Koran that I have not, Khan,” I cried; “it was the result of chance. Alla knows that two days ago I had never had a spear in my hand. I only observed what you did when you hit me, and to my good horse I owe my fortune. But it was all chance, and though I prize the victory, yet I regret that such a chance should have hurt you.”

“Nay, I am not hurt, Syud,” he replied, “and I bear these things with good humour; but if you are as good a hand with the sword as you promise to be with the spear, there will not be a man in the camp to stand before you.”

“It would be boastful in me to challenge

any one," said I, "seeing that I am a stranger among you ; yet if the noble Chéetoo wishes to try me, I will essay what I can do tomorrow."

" Good, good !" cried all ; and Cheetoo himself, vastly pleased with the result of my encounter with Ghuffoor Khan, bade me present myself early at his residence, where he would invite a few good swordsmen to attend and see us exercise.

END OF VOL. II.

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